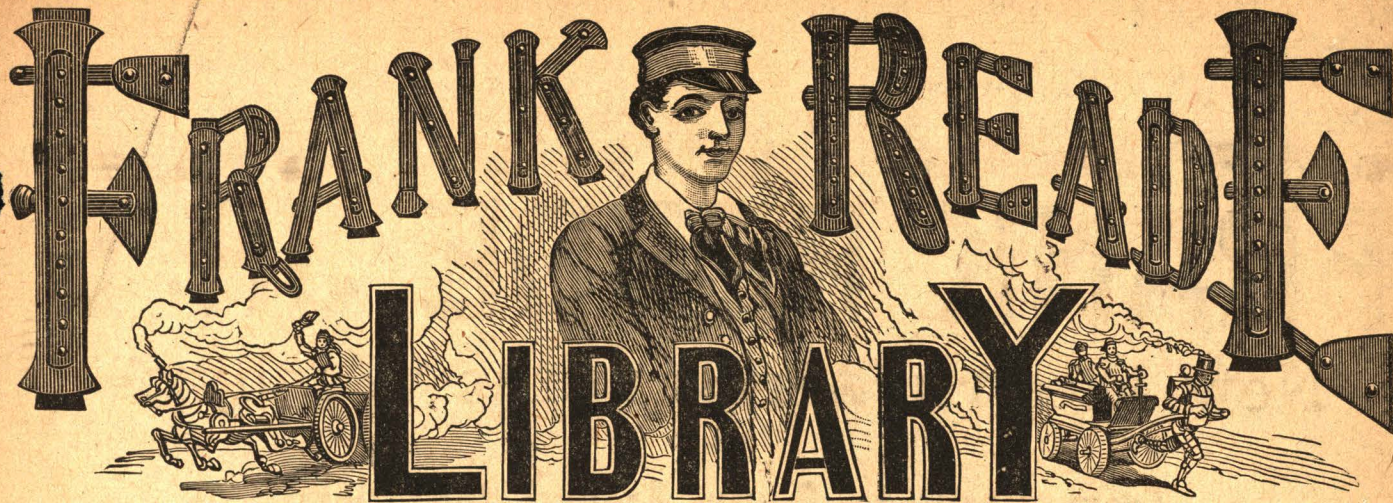


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Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, October 5, 1892.

No. 81. { COMPLETE. }

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, NEW YORK.
New York, June 1, 1894.

{ PRICE
5 CENTS. }

Vol. IV.

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Frank Reade, Jr.'s

New Electric Air-Ship the "Zephyr;" or,
From North to South Around the Globe.

By "NONAME."

PART I.



The center of that group consisted of eight stout armed Mongolians, carrying the handles of a richly draped litter. No doubt some Chinese dignitary, who was traveling with his body-guard.

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FRANK READE JR.'S

New Electric Air-Ship the "Zephyr;"

OR,

From North to South Around the Globe.

BY "NONAME."

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His Air-Ship in Asia; or, A Flight Across the Steppes," etc.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE "ZEPHYR"—A PROPOSED TRIP.

"I TELL you my new air-ship, the Zephyr, just completed, is by far the most wonderful of all my inventions. With it I shall be able to accomplish feats which have heretofore been regarded as sheer and utter impossibilities."

The speaker was a tall, handsome young man, and one of the most distinguished in his line of the present day.

Frank Reade, Jr., was his name, and his father was a famous inventor before him. The inventions of the Reades comprised many strange and wonderful machines, such as the "Steam Man," the "Electric Air-Ship," the "Electric Coach," and many others.

All over the world they were known and famous. In the charming little town of Readestown the machines were built.

For six months past Frank Reade, Jr., had been at work upon a new and wonderful air-ship.

This wonder of the air he intended should far eclipse all others in point of size and magnificence.

His speech, which forms the opening paragraph of our story, was delivered in the presence of a short, white-haired old man, who wore spectacles and had the general air of a savant, which indeed he was.

Among scientists his name was well known. Dr. Vaneyke was one of the foremost in his class.

At the moment the young inventor and the aged scientist were standing upon the granite steps of Frank Reade, Jr.'s fine residence in Readestown.

The time was ten o'clock in the morning of a beautiful June day. Below them were spread the yards and workshops of the Reades.

"I knew that you would soon come out with a new wonder, Frank," cried Dr. Vaneyke, rubbing his hands excitedly. "So it is another air-ship, eh? The Zephyr? Well, may you have luck with her."

"Thank you!" replied Frank.

"But what is your intention? Will you take a long voyage in her?" asked the scientist.

"Yes," replied Frank, "I intend to accomplish a feat which has never before been even

attempted and which will stupefy the whole world with its magnitude."

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor, with interest. "What may it be? Will you disclose it at so early a day?"

"It is no secret," replied the young inventor. "You have no doubt seen many men who can boast of having made the trip around the world from East to West or vice versa. But never from North to South."

"From North to South?" cried Dr. Vaneyke, "why that is impossible Frank."

"Not with the Zephyr."

The scientist clapped his hands.

"What an idea!" he cried, excitedly. "From north to south around the globe. Wonderful! It will be the talk of the world. And what a chance for scientific observations. Will you take any companions?"

Frank laughed and slapped the aged scientist heartily upon the back.

"Do not have any fears, my dear doctor," he said, reassuringly. "You have been with me upon many trips and I would not leave you at home if you care to go."

"Of course I shall."

"Enough! It is all settled. Now come down to the shop and I will show you the Zephyr."

"I shall be more than delighted."

With a wave of his hand Frank might have called out his coachman and span to drive them down to the works, but he did not, as it was not very far.

Together they walked down the hill, and soon reached the gate.

Entering the yard, Frank led the way to a vast, high-roofed building. As soon as they entered this building they beheld a wonderful spectacle.

Resting upon a frame-work of timbers was what looked like the hull of a clipper ship.

The long, rakish bow and steel ram in front, however, disproved this supposition, and Dr. Vaneyke exclaimed:

"Upon my soul, Frank, she is a beauty and no mistake! She is a different type of ship from any other you have built."

"Yes," replied the young inventor; "I have departed radically from all previous lines. That ram in front and her sheer bow would re-

mind one of Uncle Sam's cruisers. The hull, you see, is more narrow and rakish and many feet larger and deeper."

"I see," agreed the scientist.

"Also there are a larger number of suspensory helices. I have found it necessary to construct ten on a side or twenty in all. This will give the ship greater power and superior buoyancy. In all respects the Zephyr is the superior of all others."

For the sake of brevity we will not accompany Frank and the scientist in their tour about the Zephyr, but describe the ship in fewer words, and which will enable us to pass on the quicker to exciting incidents of our story.

Of course, being an air-ship, the question of buoyancy and lightness of material had entered largely into the construction of the Zephyr.

Her hull being high one hundred feet in length, was long and rakish, with a ram-like bow.

The hull itself was of thinly rolled, but firm platinum, and capable of resisting a rifle ball. The ram on the bow was of hollow, but tough steel.

The deck was much like the deck of an ordinary ship. There was the main and after cabins, and forward was the pilot house, a square apartment of which all four sides were of toughest plate glass.

Upon each side of the air-ship and next to the rail at intervals of eight feet were tall steel standards, each braced with strongest wire.

Upon the tops of these standards, which were hollow and contained a revolving rod, were helices or flange-shaped wings of lightly rolled steel. These were capable of being driven with terrific speed, forming the means of propulsion upward of the air-ship.

At the stern was the rudder and propeller, a huge flanged apparatus much like the screw of an ocean steamer.

The general outside appearance of the Zephyr was neat, light and handsome. Below the first deck was the engine-room and powerful electrical machinery.

This latter deserves a more elaborate account than we find it feasible to here give.

Powerful dynamos, actuated by immense storage power confined in jars in the hold and

generated by a process, which was a secret of the inventor's, furnished the motive power.

The engine-room was a large cabin, in which were the dynamos and a switch for the helices, the propeller and other purposes.

The cabins were furnished with great magnificence.

There was a beautiful salon with rich decorations and articles of vertu and bric-a-brac without end. The private staterooms were rich in their luxuriousness.

The interior of the air-ship was like the abode of a prince of the blood.

The armory was a cabin fitted up with a small arsenal of rifles and revolvers of the latest pattern and make. Ammunition was in good store. These were important adjuncts, for a trip with the air-ship would be likely to bring one into wild parts of the world where weapons would be needed.

Upon the bow of the air-ship was painted the name Zephyr. The ship lay upon her framework all ready for the touch of the electric lever to mount into the air.

A test had already been given, and there was no doubt but that she would fly. No failure on that score.

"Well, professor," asked Frank Reade, Jr., after the tour of inspection. "Do you think the Zephyr is capable of circumnavigating the globe from north to south?"

"I do, if such a feat is possible by any living person," replied Dr. Vaneyke.

"What do you think of her?"

"Grand! Magnificent! I am much in love with her."

"I fancied that you would be. She far excels all the others. Well, doctor, then you'll decide to go with me?"

"Of course I shall. But who else will you take?"

"Only Barney and Pomp. They have been with me in all my travels, and I could not really hope to accomplish a voyage safely without them."

"They are brave, loyal fellows," cried Dr. Vaneyke, heartily. "It will seem like old times, Frank, to be aboard an air-ship with you and Barney and Pomp once more."

"Indeed it will," cried Frank, enthusiastically. "Doctor, I hope to make this the star trip of my life."

"I hope that it will be."

"I feel that it will."

"Well, I will go back to the Antique Society's rooms and get ready for the trip. When shall we start?"

"In ten days."

"Good! Do Barney and Pomp know of it?"

"I shall let them know to-day."

"Does anybody else know of it?"

"Everybody ought to. I gave the facts to a reporter day before yesterday. I saw it published in the newspapers."

"Indeed?" said the scientist, deprecatingly. "I must confess to not having read the paper for three days. Having a scientific problem on hand, I—"

Dr. Vaneyke did not finish the sentence. He clutched Frank's arm, and gasped:

"There—there! Did you see him?"

Frank was astounded. The scientist's face was like marble, and he pointed to the yard beyond the open door.

"See him? Who?" asked the astonished inventor. "What's the matter with you, Vaneyke?"

The scientist partly recovered himself, but said, fearfully:

"Heavens! If ever I saw murder in any

man's face, I did at that moment. He had a pistol in his hand, and his fiendish gaze was fixed right on you."

Frank waited to hear no more. With a bound he reached the door.

He comprehended the situation at once. There were always a great number of desperate cranks hanging about the yards, half-crazed inventors and crushed machinists, each occupied with the delusion that the secret of Frank's machine had been stolen from them.

The famous inventor was daily in receipt of threatening letters, demanding various sums of money on penalty of death.

Therefore, convinced that Dr. Vaneyke had seen a crank he was bent upon spotting the fellow and having him expelled.

But when he reached the door the yard seemed empty.

The fellow had disappeared. Frank could see no hiding-place, and said:

"You must have been mistaken, doctor. He is not in sight now."

"No," cried Dr. Vaneyke, positively. "I tell you I saw him plainly."

"Well, if he is about here——"

Frank did not finish the sentence.

The sharp report of a pistol rang out upon the June air. With a groan Frank Reade, Jr., threw up his arms and fell the whole length of the steps.

He lay at their foot, white and silent. With an awful cry of horror, Dr. Vaneyke was quickly by his side.

CHAPTER II.

AN IMPORTANT MISSION—THE START.

FOR a moment the scientist in his horror and excitement believed that the famous inventor was dead.

He sprang to his side instantly. Frank lay still and pallid upon the ground. Blood was upon his handsome face.

"My God! he is killed!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, wildly. "Help! Send for a doctor! Pursue the murderer!"

The maniacal laugh of the murderous crank rang through the building as he fled for safety. But the area was almost instantly filled with workmen.

Several armed guards kept watch of the place and these went in pursuit of the crank.

While Frank was quickly removed to the office and placed upon a couch, doctors arrived a few moments later, but before they came Dr. Vaneyke made the joyous discovery that Frank was not fatally wounded. A strange interposition of Providence had saved his life.

The bullet had struck a metal number upon the visor of his cap, which was set in a monogram of brass. This, being quite solid metal, had diverted the ball, which had thus been prevented from crashing into his brain.

But it had coursed along his skull in a savage manner, plowing up the flesh and producing a concussion, which, while it might not prove serious, was nevertheless most painful.

A diagnosis by the doctors resulted in the decision that Frank would live.

He was removed to his home and kept in a dark room for several days. The effects of the concussion passed off and he mended rapidly.

Of course the departure of the Zephyr was delayed by this incident. A tremendous sensation was created by it all over the country.

The newspapers had thrilling accounts of the attempted assassination of the famous young inventor. Illustrations and long articles, descriptive of the Zephyr and the projected trip around the globe from north to south were in

order, and the matter was upon everybody's tongue.

Frank's wife was nearly distraught when he was brought home. It was quite natural that she should disapprove of his intended expedition, but she made no outward sign of this feeling.

But two visitors to Frank's bedside evinced probably more real heart-felt emotion than many others.

One was a negro, an old and faithful servant of the Reades, who went by the patronymic of Pomp.

The other was an Irishman named Barney O'Shea. Both were old time companions of both Frank and his father upon all of their famous trips.

"Fo' goodness sakes alibe, Marse Frank!" cried the devoted Pomp with tears in his eyes. "I'se jes' glad dat youse am gwine to lib aftah all. If I'se eber get's a chaine fo' to get my paws on dat crank, I'se jes' de berry coon what will make him dance, an' don' yo' fergit it."

"Be jabers, I'd tar and feather ther omadhoun," exploded Barney, vehemently. "Be me sowl, he ought to be hung up by the heels for the rist av his loife."

Frank was not a little touched by the evident devotion of Barney and Pomp. He assured them that he would soon be himself again, and all would yet come out right. Then he imparted to them the full particulars of his proposed trip from north to south around the globe.

Both were delighted with the plan. Barney twirled his cane for a shillelah and Pomp danced a break-down.

"We'se'll be dar, Marse Frank," cried the coon. "Oh, yas, youse kin be mighty suah ob dat."

"Yez are too fresh, naygur," cried Barney, giving Pomp a taste of the shillelah on his shins.

The darky roared with pain. Then instantly lowering his head he made a blind rush at Barney.

Though these two odd characters were the best of friends, they were ever playing pranks upon each other. Each was an inveterate practical joker.

Pomp's head took Barney full in the stomach. The Celt sat down so hard that his teeth rattled.

But he was quickly upon his feet, and rushed upon the darky. They gripped, and then followed a wrestle which only terminated when both got so tired that further exertion was out of the question.

Frank Reade, Jr., was soon himself again. The crank who shot him was never captured, having made good his escape. But the guard about the works was doubled.

Preparations were under way for the famous trip around the world.

Readstown was in a state of furore. Thousands of curious people from all over the country congregated in the town to view the ascent of the air-ship.

The office and Frank Reade, Jr.'s house was besieged by the representatives of the press, each eager to interview the famous voyager.

Of course there were the usual coterie of people begging the oddest kind of favors.

One old lady requested Frank to bring her a small bit of the North Pole to place with her collection of relics. Another wished the young inventor to bring her a shawl "right from Cashmere," while a third wanted the autograph of the Sultan.

Dr. Vaneyke was the envied of all scientists

He could have hung himself with all manner of personal requests, but like Frank himself coldly and ungenerously refused.

But the day before the departure of the Zephyr, one request reached Frank Reade, Jr., which went to his heart.

A lady, slender and pallid and dressed in deepest black succeeded in reaching the gate of the Machine Works. Here she held her weary wait.

As fortune had it, Frank Reade, Jr. came out by this gate. Her hand was laid tremblingly upon his arm.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, in a voice so intensely sorrowful and weak that Frank was touched. "I beg you, save my boy if you can. I know he is alive, my heart tells me so, and that he will come back to me. My prayers must be answered."

"My good woman," said Frank, gently. "I do not understand you."

"God bless you, for listening to a grief-crazed woman," she cried, fervidly. "He will bless you for that. Will you listen to my story and will you help me?"

Frank swung the gate back again and said: "Come inside. I will hear you."

The woman followed with tottering steps. Frank led the way to the office. Here he offered the woman a chair.

Then he listened to a tale of woe which thrilled him.

"I am Mrs. William North," she said, in faint tones. "I am a widow, and my sole support until within eighteen months has been my son, Adrian."

"He was noble and good was Adrian, and my great comfort until Wesley Hawke, scoundrel that he is, enticed him away to sea upon a whaling ship, with the promise of large pay and a share in the profits of the voyage."

"The Sea Gull, a vessel owned in part by Hawke, who was Adrian's cousin, as I may explain, sailed for the Northern sea in quest of whales. When the ship returned, Hawke told me that Adrian, while out with a boat in pursuit of a whale, was lost in a fog and could not be rescued."

"My grief you can imagine. But I have since formed the belief that Adrian was the victim of a foul and villainous plot."

"My husband's brother, a millionaire in the West, had died a few years previous and left his property in trust to be equally divided between Adrian and Wesley, when Adrian was twenty-one years of age. Hawke many times had been heard to curse his uncle for not leaving the whole fortune to him."

"I believe his avarice and hatred led him to decoy Adrian into that fatal voyage. I cannot prove this, nor would I care, if I could only have my boy back again. I cling to the mad hope that he is yet alive, and may be found somewhere in that terrible Arctic wilderness. Oh, sir, I know that you have a good kind heart. I have come here to ask of you if you would look for my boy, when you reach the Artic. It is my only hope of his salvation."

She ceased speaking, and the light of pleading in her tearful eyes, went to Frank's heart.

The young inventor was not of the kind to resist such an appeal as that, so he quickly replied:

"My dear madam, rest assured that you have my heart-felt sympathy. I will certainly accede to your request. I will make it a point to cruise through the Artic quite thoroughly, though I would not hold out to you any false hopes. I fear that you will never see your son again."

The poor woman went down on her knees. "God will bless you for it," she cried. "As he will punish the villain who has brought this sorrow upon me."

Again Frank assured Mrs. North that he would do his best to rescue Adrian. Then the afflicted woman took her leave much comforted in mind.

This was only twelve hours before the departure of the Zephyr upon her wonderful voyage.

Everything had been put in readiness for the start.

Stores and ammunition were aboard the air-ship in great plenty. Barney and Pomp and Dr. Vaneyke were already domiciled there.

The doctor was flooded with letters and telegrams from all over the country, containing all sorts of requests and suggestions. He filed them all away, it being impossible for him to give them his attention.

But early in the morning an important message came to Frank's house from across the Atlantic. It bore the frank of the Swedish consul at New York, and was countersigned by the prime minister of Sweden, and was signed "Oscar, King of Sweden." Thus it read:

"To FRANK READE, JR.,
Readstown, U. S. A."

"Distinguished Sir:—Being apprised of the contemplated trip around the globe from north to south which you will make in your air-ship, it has occurred to the king to request of you that you will devote some part of your valuable time in the interest of suffering humanity to make search for the stranded crew of the Government exploring ship Thor, which left Stockholm twenty-two months ago, and has not been heard from since. The Crown stands ready to pay you any indemnity for your trouble, and will ever hold in grateful remembrance such a service, the nature of which must appeal to the heart of any true man."

Signed,
"OSCAR."

Frank read this communication with interest. Truly, his trip, was already becoming involved with several very important missions.

But this would only add zest to the voyage, and he did not hesitate to answer, American-like, in this terse fashion:

"To OSCAR, King of Sweden:—I will comply with your request.
Yours truly,
"FRANK READE, JR."

Then Frank was driven to the public square, where the air-ship was in readiness for the ascension.

The Zephyr, a perfect beauty in symmetry and form, rested upon a temporary platform.

A band was playing, a great crowd thronged the square, and Barney and Pomp were at their posts, and Dr. Vaneyke was at the rail making farewell nods to his friends.

Frank kissed his wife and little boy good-by, and shook hands with a number of friends. The bands played, the people cheered, and while Frank stood at the rail and lifted his hat, Barney cast free the anchor cable, and Pomp in the pilot-house turned the lever which set the twenty helices in motion, and the next moment the Zephyr leaped into the air.

The eventful journey, destined to be fraught with many fearful experiences, was begun.

CHAPTER III.

IN HUDSON'S BAY.

UP into the air leaped the Zephyr. In a few seconds she was two thousand feet above the surface of the earth.

The scene below was a hazy panorama. The town looked like a pigmy village, and the people were but fleas in point of size.

For a moment the Zephyr hovered at this awful height, then Barney set the propeller in motion, and the course was set due north.

The journey was begun.

All took a last look at Readstown. It would be some time before they would see it again if ever.

The air was dull and hazy, and there was a strong concentration of the sun's rays on the air-ship's deck.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke sought the cover of awnings, and began to study several important charts.

Barney busied himself with the dynamos, and Pomp kept at his post in the pilot-house.

The first day passed without incident. With the coming of night they were far above a mighty body of water.

This was ascertained to be Lake Superior and the next day would see the air-ship well into the British Dominions.

Frank had decided to strike at once for Hudson's Bay, and from there he would cruise over towards Smith's Sound and the likely points to find the castaway Arctic explorers.

Several days passed without any event of importance occurring.

The air-ship kept steadily to the northward. A mighty track of wilderness and primeval forest lay far beneath.

They were far beyond the bounds of civilization, and the air had begun to grow chill and sharp as they neared the northern latitudes.

Manitoba and the lakes of Winnipeg and Winnipegosis had been left far behind. One morning Dr. Vaneyke, who was on deck at an early hour, sighted the distant waters of Hudson's Bay.

Consulting the chart the scientist decided that they were nearing the mouth of the Nelson river.

At this point it had been decided to descend and refill the generating jars with fresh water. Also the doctor was desirous of making a few trips along the coast in the interest of science.

There was not a sign of human habitation visible anywhere as the air-ship settled down upon a small hillock which was devoid of trees, and from which a good view of the sea could be had.

As it was the month of June the summer of the North had not opened, and ice still fringed the shore and snow was in patches in the woods.

But the voyagers were all provided with warm clothing and did not greatly mind the chill air.

Pomp was left on board the ship while Frank, Dr. Vaneyke and Barney started forth upon an exploring tour.

They were soon out of sight, and Pomp began to busy himself in the galley with his cooking utensils.

"Reckon dar ain't much use ob keepin' guard in dis yer fo'saken place," he muttered. "Dar ain't no peoples about yer fo' suah. I jes' done fink I gets some ob my cookin' done fo' a time."

So the ducky kept diligently at work in his cooking quarters, wholly ignoring the deck.

His mistake soon became obvious.

If there were no human beings who found habitation in that dreary solitude there were other foes, and these were not slow to seize the opportunity to court an acquaintance with the air-ship.

Pomp's first intimation of danger was received in a startling manner.

He was just giving the finishing touches to a pile of dough when he heard a lumbering tread in the passageway behind him and a tremendous snort.

The ducky wheeled as if upon a pivot.

The sight which rewarded his gaze would have caused him to turn a deadly pallor had such a thing been possible.

As it was he was a much surprised and terrified ducky.

There before him, reared upon his hind legs,

was a mighty specimen of the savage northern bear. At this latitude the bear, undoubtedly of the same species as the white bear of the Arctic, boasts of shaggy fur of a course gray color.

"Glory, fo' goodness sakes alibe! I'se lost, de debbil hab done come aftah me," exploded the terrified darky. "Ki dar, get away yo' ole stuff. Take dat!"

In the fever of the moment Pomp seized a pot of boiling fat in which he had been frying doughnuts.

Quick as a flash he hurled its contents at the bear.

The hot fat struck bruin full force fair in the face. The result was most comical.

Of course the hot liquid scalded the bear's nose, mouth and blinded his eyes. With a wild howl of pain bruin collapsed and tumbled over backward in a mad heap, thrashing about furiously in his agony.

How the beast succeeded in doing so was a wonder, but he managed to get out upon the deck. There to Pomp's amazement he beheld three more bears.

One of them had taken possession of the pilot house and began to investigate matters to his sorrow.

He put one of his huge paws full upon one of the heavily charged metal discs, and the next moment was a most demoralized bear.

His several hundred pounds of bear flesh was hurled out upon the deck, and judging from the howls of pain, he had got the worst of the bargain. He picked himself up and slid off the deck of the air-ship in hot haste.

Meanwhile the bear whom Pomp had so harshly treated, was also beating a retreat wildly toward the salt water.

But the remaining two bears held the fort bravely. They stood upon their hind legs, sniffed the air, and then espying Pomp started for him.

But the darky had armed himself with an elephant rifle. He fired one of the explosive shells at one of the bears.

It struck the brute in the shoulder and crippled him. But before Pomp could fire again the other bear was upon him.

The darky was not quick enough to get out of the way.

The bear's huge paw dashed the rifle from his hands, and another blow sent Pomp tumbling end over end.

The darky was knocked clear over the rail of the air-ship and fell to the ground. The bear in pursuit would have been upon him in another moment, for the darky was stunned by the blow.

But suddenly a wild shout was heard, and then followed a volley of rifle balls.

Bruin fell in a heap. One of the balls had struck a vital part and killed him.

Dr. Vaneyke, Barney and Frank Reade, Jr., came rushing up to the spot in great excitement. The other bears, however, had made off, and the excitement was all over.

Pomp quickly recovered and told the whole story.

"It serves you right for not staying on guard as I told you," said Frank Reade, sternly. "Do not fail to heed my orders next time."

Pomp, much crestfallen, returned to the galley. Barney stuck his tongue in his cheek at him and grinned.

This made Pomp furious, and he muttered:

"I'll jes' come square wid dat I'shman, anyhow, jes' see if I don't!"

How Pomp kept his threat we shall see later on.

It was decided to cross Hudson's Bay with-

out delay, and not to make another stop until the region of perpetual ice had been reached.

Accordingly the air-ship was once more raised, and was soon sailing away to the northward over the black waters of the big bay.

As they went swiftly northward now, the waters began to undergo a change. Icebergs and floes were encountered, and other evidences of a near approach to the Arctic regions.

The air became very piercing, but the voyagers were well prepared for this. Frank Reade had provided fur suits for all hands, and these were now donned.

It was the second morning after leaving the south shore of the vast bay, when as Dr. Vaneyke was standing in the bow of the air-ship, studying the horizon with a glass, he gave a sharp cry.

Pomp was in the pilot-house.

"What am dat, Marse Vaneyke?" he asked.

"Why it looks like a man on a floating cake of ice!" cried the doctor, excitedly.

"And it is," agreed Frank. "There are two of them. Bear down that way, Pomp."

The darky helmsman obeyed. Nearer they drew to a large cake of ice floating in the black, tossing waters. Upon it were two men, who were waving their arms and shouting in a transported manner at the sudden prospect of a rescue.

The voyagers on board the Zephyr were not a little amazed at finding two men of their own color in such a predicament in this out-of-the-way part of the world, and at once everybody's curiosity was aroused.

Frank seized a long rope and flung it over the rail.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATE OF THE ARCTIC EXPLORERS.

As Frank Reade, Jr. flung the rope, the air-ship came to a stop just over the castaways.

The two men on the cake of ice were shouting themselves hoarse, and seemed in a delirium of joy.

It was easy to see by their general looks that they were not Americans, but Swedish sailors.

They were clad in suits of fur and carried Esquimaux lances instead of fire-arms. Their appearance did not indicate that they had suffered long from hunger or been long on the berg.

The air-ship was lowered, and Frank, swinging the rope, shouted:

"Ahoy! do you want help?"

"Yes," shouted back one of the men in good English.

"Who are you?"

"I am Hans Olsen and I was captain of the good ship Thor until we were nipped in the ice, and the ship was lost. This is Gustaf Strom, my first mate. We have been two years in this accursed land. Six of our crew survive. We were separated from them and set adrift while hunting on the ice-fields. We have not seen them for six weeks. In the name of humanity give us help."

"What luck!" cried Frank, turning to his companions. "These are a part of the Swedish ship's crew which King Oscar asked me to look for. That captain speaks good English."

Then he raised his voice:

"Have courage, Captain Olsen. We were on the lookout for you."

"Were you sent for us?"

"Not exactly, but we will see that you get safely home."

"If we could reach Upernavik, or any settle-

ment below Davis Straits, we could get home all right."

"Do you know where you are now?" asked Frank.

"We have no idea."

"You are in Hudson's Bay."

The two castaways seemed surprised. Then Olsen shouted:

"But what sort of a craft is that, which can sail in the air as well as the water? That is a new invention since we left civilization."

The two castaways were regarding the air-ship with great wonder.

But the rope now struck the ice cake. In a short time both were hauled aboard.

As they reached the deck of the air-ship their amazement knew no bounds.

The mate, Strom, could not speak English. But the captain acted as interpreter, and satisfactory explanations followed.

It was certainly a wonderful working of Providence that the Zephyr should have struck the objects of its quest so soon.

But the two castaways were hungry, faint and wearied with long exposure to wind and wave on the ice cake. Ordinary men could not have survived the hardships which they experienced.

But Swedes are known as hardy sailors and strong in constitution. Reared in a cold climate, they were the best fitted to cope with the extreme cold.

They had found means of subsistence only with extreme difficulty. But affiliating for one season with a tribe of Esquimaux, they had learned how to prepare and preserve dried meats, bits of seal meat and fish.

Fortunately, when exiled from their friends upon the ice cake, they had plenty of this food with them, and this had kept them alive, although the supply was giving out when the air-ship chanced to spy them.

The two sailors were completely wonder-struck with the workings of the Zephyr.

Captain Olsen walked from stem to stern and in a mystified way regarded the revolving helices and the electrical machinery of the ship.

"Upon my soul!" he exclaimed, in great wonderment, "I have never seen the equal of this! Why, there's no use of sailing the seas now. It's navigation of the air we must all learn. When I get home I'll make the shift."

"Ah, my good sir!" said Dr. Vaneyke, explanatively. "You are enjoying an experience accorded to but few men. This is the only air-ship in existence."

"So?" exclaimed the Swedish captain. "Ah, well, the air will soon be full of them."

"I think not," disagreed the scientist. "Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., is the only living man who has the secret of the air-ship."

But Captain Olsen could not be convinced that the world would not soon be over-run with air-ships, and that the days of the merchant marine were over.

The two castaways were made comfortable, and then Olsen went into the cabin with Frank and located with Frank as nearly as possible the location where he had left his companions.

"It cannot be more than five hundred miles to the north," he declared. "We have wandered for two years to the southward. If we are now in Hudson's Bay I should say that my men must be at the present moment somewhere near Cape Wolstenholme."

"Very well," said Frank. "We will set our course thither."

Accordingly the air-ship's course was set in that direction.

The days were now becoming longer as they

drew nearer the Polar regions. The sun ran lower on the horizon, and presented the phenomenon seen at Stockholm at certain times of the year.

Five hundred miles was quite a long stretch over the broad, tossing waters of Hudson's Bay, but finally land was sighted, and the cry went up:

"Land ho!"

The air-ship was soon leaving the waters of Hudson's Bay behind and crossing a part of the northern extremity of Rupert's Land. Soon the ice bound Hudson's Straits were seen ahead.

Captain Olsen was at the air-ship's rail and watching intently for the spot where he had left his companions.

The location of Cape Wolstenholme was easily found, and suddenly Olsen cried:

"Ah, friends, there they are. God grant they are alive and well."

A collection of snow huts were seen on the shore of the ice bound straits. But there was no sign of life about them.

Captain Olsen and his mate walked up and down the deck in an agitated way.

"Oh, I fear the worst!" cried the captain, wringing his hands. "If they were alive they would come out and welcome us."

"Have no fears, sir," said Dr. Vaneyke, "they may be asleep or away on a hunt."

This somewhat calmed Olsen's fears. The air-ship settled down and rested upon a field of ice not far from the snow huts.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., with Barney led the way to the ground. Pomp and Dr. Vaneyke remained aboard the Zephyr.

Hastily the little party of rescuers made their way toward the snow huts.

But before they were reached, a chill foreboding, seized Frank Reade, Jr. He guessed the truth, even before with a few blows of an ax, the ice cakes before the entrance of the main hut were removed.

The sight revealed was a heart-rending one.

There, in a ghastly row, lay the decomposing bodies of the six seamen. With a cry of sorrow, Captain Olsen turned away, covering his face with his hands.

Disease and starvation had overtaken the luckless sailors after the leave-taking of their captain. The door of the ice hut was closed and sealed. It was as fitting a tomb as could have been erected, so the bodies were not disturbed.

Returning to the air-ship, it was decided to proceed at once to the nearest settlement, on the coast of Labrador, and there the two survivors of the ill-fated Arctic expedition could find transportation home aboard some sealing ship.

But a strange darkness had begun to settle down over the region. Indeed, in a few moments one could hardly see his hand before him.

The air became filled with cutting hail and a powerful wind set in from the northwest quarter.

Frank Reade, Jr. knew well what an Arctic storm of this character was. Its dangers were not to be easily enumerated.

The temperature often went down in an hour's time to thirty or forty degrees below zero, an intense cold, which few of the readers of this story could truly comprehend.

What was more, the gale was of a terrific cyclonic character. The air-ship would certainly have a hard time in outliving it, unless it could escape entirely by mounting upward to a sufficient height to escape its greater force.

This was not an easy thing to do. In warm climates it was very easy to rise above a storm cloud, for the mild air would support life at a greater height.

But in this region of great altitude the rarity of the air was so great that human life could not endure at a very great height. Frank was well aware of this.

And this was a very good and sufficient reason for his great alarm.

"Golly, Marse Frank," said Pomp, in an undertone, as they came aboard the Zephyr. "I done fink we'se gwine to hab a bit ob a blow."

"You're right, Pomp," said Frank in a steady voice.

"What youse gwine fo' to do? Is yo' gwine to stay yer, Marse Frank?"

"No," replied the famous inventor, decidedly; "that would never do. The best thing we can do is to run before it."

Pomp received his orders and sprang into the pilot-house. Barney was quickly at his post in the engine room.

The helices began to revolve and the ship shot up into the air.

The propeller was run full speed in the effort to out-run the storm. The air-ship flew through space like a mighty bird.

Of course there was no little risk in the attempt. In the blackness it would not have been impossible to have misjudged the proper height and have run full head into some elevation of land or ice.

Indeed, as the Zephyr was thus under full head Pomp was stationed in the bow as watch, while Frank handled the steering gear.

How the wind did howl like a thousand der-vishes, and the hail and fleeting snow cut like a knife through the thick skin suit of Pomp as he held his position heroically in the bow.

The ship was flying like a meteor through space.

Frank knew that the run could not last forever. The storm would soon shift its course and leave them or become spent. Already he felt the force of the wind lessening.

The passengers, the two Swedes and Dr. Vaneyke, were well satisfied to remain in the cabin.

It was warm and comfortable there, though the rocking and swaying of the air-ship precluded anything like ease of mind. All hoped sincerely for the speedy ending of the storm.

But the hours passed and the ship still kept on.

Frank knew that they had covered several hundred miles, and that they must be somewhere along the coast of Hudon's Straits, or possibly over the ice fields.

He was congratulating himself that the storm would soon be past and the danger over, when a thrilling thing occurred.

It was the first real disaster of the trip, and came in a sudden and unexpected manner.

Suddenly a sharp warning cry came from Pomp in the bow.

Frank heard it with a peculiar chill.

Then straining his vision through the plate glass front of the pilot-house, he saw a mighty white object just ahead in the gloom.

It looked like a mighty mountain of white, and might have been a cloud for its seeming intangibility. But Frank, with a chill of horror, recognized its deadly character.

He instantly reversed the propeller lever and swayed the helm, at the same time giving full current to the helices.

But in vain. The air-ship was close upon the

iceberg, (for such it was) and struck it full force.

There was a terrific collision, and every man was hurled from his feet.

Then darkness and stillness, broken only by the humming of the dynamos, ensued.

Frank Reade, Jr., had been stunned by the shock, but with an effort recovered himself and crawled out upon the deck.

He went as directly as possible to the search light.

CHAPTER V.

RELEASED—THE ESQUIMAUX BATTLE.

FOR aught he knew the air-ship was a complete wreck. The full horrors of the situation dawned upon Frank Reade.

He instinctively reflected upon the possibilities of such a contingency.

What a fearful fate was theirs? Thrown upon an ice-berg in the frozen north, with the air-ship crushed and no means at hand of reaching civilization, the situation would indeed have been frightful to contemplate.

But Frank would not believe that it was quite as bad as this.

Hope was one of the dominant parts of his composition.

He reached the search-light platform and turned the screw. The dynamo worked in a prompt fashion, and in an instant the whole berg was revealed in a noon-day glare of light.

The position of the air-ship was seen at a glance.

She rested between two wedge-shaped pinnacles of the berg. Fortunately she had not struck bow on, but rather had glided between these two pinnacles and there remained wedged immovably.

Of course it had stopped the machinery, and the shock had disconnected the dynamos which continued to hum.

But as far as his investigation would permit, Frank could not see that the ship was hurt at all.

A huge cake of ice had slid across the bow and contributed to hold the Zephyr in her place.

The air-ship was simply held a prisoner upon the tip-top of the mighty berg. Truly it was a wonderful experience and a narrow escape.

Frank could have danced with joy at the realization that the ship was unhurt.

By this time the others had recovered themselves and came rushing out. When the situation became apparent to them they were no less overjoyed than Frank had been.

But though it was plain that the air-ship was not badly injured, it was by no means easy to see how it was to be extricated from its present position.

The berg upon which it rested seemed to be stationary in the midst of a vast ice field.

However, nothing could be done until the storm was over, so all returned to the warmth of the cabin and made themselves as comfortable as possible.

A few hours sufficed to terminate the fury of the storm.

But the air-ship was a sight to behold. From stem to stern, from deck to helice shaft it was coated with ice.

The position of the ship could now be more plainly seen.

The possibility of extricating it from its position was also easier to discuss. But how to do it was a problem.

The block of ice across the Zephyr's bow weighed tons. To remove it would require gigantic power, indeed.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not long in devising an expedient.

From the hold of the Zephyr he brought forth a long cable made of steel wire. This was a most powerful rope, and capable of sustaining a weight of tons.

With extreme difficulty, Barney and Pomp succeeded in girthing the ice block with this.

Then a heavy block was attached to a distant spur of the iceberg at the proper angle. The powerful electrical engine was called upon to wind the other end of the rope about the propeller shaft, in lieu of a drum.

This brought a tremendous strain to bear upon the ice cake. At the proper moment Frank gave the order for the engine to start.

There was a tremendous straining and creaking, and the steel cable straightened. Then slowly but surely the ice cake began to give way before the powerful pressure.

Steadily and by degrees the ice block slid off the air-ship's bow.

The real extent of the damage could now be seen. The rail had been crushed in and a part of the bulwarks, but all this was damage which a little carpentering could easily repair.

Altogether there was good reason for congratulations over the success of the undertaking. The only thing now which barred the air-ship's rising was the pressure of the spurs of ice upon either side.

Frank quickly solved this problem. He procured a live wire from the engine-room, which he handled with insulating gloves and very carefully at that.

This he extended along both sides of the air-ship and brought it in contact with the ice.

The heat of the electric current being given the right circulation, made the wires red hot and its contact with the ice melted it away in its connection with the air-ship, so that in a very short space of time water was pouring in a torrent over the bow and stern of the ship.

In less than an hour the Zephyr was freed from her icy fetters. Amid cheers she once more soared aloft.

"Golly sakes!" cried Pomp, cutting a pigeon wing on the deck. "It am dreiful hard work to beat Marse Frank when he sets out fo' to do a thing, dat am a fac!"

"Begorra, that's so," agreed Barney, slyly putting out his foot.

The result was that Pomp's pigeon wing was brought to a disastrous conclusion. The darky's feet became entangled and he fell on his nose raising a big bruise.

But Pomp was on his feet in an instant.

He was not going to be beaten by the sky-larking of his friend if he could help it.

"Hi dar, yo' 'ish muff," he yelled. "I jes' pay yo' fo' dat, an' don' yo' fo' git it. Look out dar!"

Barney attempted to "look out," but he was not quick enough.

The darky lowered his head and came at the Celt like a steam ram. Taken fairly in the stomach, Barney went over like a tenpin, and for several moments made vain efforts to recover his breath.

Pomp had his revenge in good fashion. Barney would not have submitted, however, had it not been for Frank Reade, Jr., who peremptorily put an end to the affair.

The Zephyr, released from the iceberg, now set her course once more to the south-east.

But the storm had carried the air-ship further to the north than had at first been supposed.

Mighty ice fields were all about them, and upon taking bearings Frank was surprised to

find that they were once more over the widest part of Hudson's Straits.

However, there was no other way but to make the best of it and set a course at once for Labrador, or the east coast.

The air-ship was speeding along at an elevation of two hundred feet, when suddenly Dr. Vaneyke, who was in the bow studying the topography of the region below, gave a sharp cry.

"Frank, come here quick!" he shouted.

"What is the matter?" asked the young inventor, as he rushed to the rail.

"Look down there! Do you see that battle going on?" Why, they are hostile bands of Esquimaux, are they not?"

Frank saw at a glance that this was the truth. Two bands of Esquimaux of hostile tribes were engaged in a pitched battle on the ice-plain.

There were over one hundred in the party, and they were having a hot time of it. It was evident that none of them had seen the air-ship.

Frank turned and shouted an order to Pomp in the pilot-house.

The air-ship was held in suspension above the plain, and the voyagers, with great interest, watched the battle.

"Whurrool!" shouted Barney, waving his cap. "I'll bate me loife an ther gossoons with the white bearskin hats!"

"Golly! I take yo' on dat, 'ish!" cried Pomp. "But I'll bet yo' somefin' mo' valuable dan dat."

"Phwat's that, naygur?"

"I jes' bets yo' fifty cents, 'ish."

Everybody laughed at this sally, and Barney made a vicious movement toward the darky.

But the fight now was assuming the proportions of a terrific battle. The Esquimaux had no fire arms, but they wielded their spears and bows and arrows with great fury.

Numbers of dead and wounded were strewn upon the ice plain. How the affair might result it was difficult to say.

The advantage did not seem to lie with either. Each seemed to be decimating the numbers of the other in equal proportion. It looked as if they might fight until both bands were literally wiped out.

One band wore helmets or caps of white fur, and this distinguished them from their opponents. They displayed unusual courage and tenacity for Esquimaux.

"Upon my word!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, "those fellows are unlike most of the Esquimaux I have seen."

"Ah, sir!" exclaimed the Swedish captain.

"I have lived among them. These are not like the natives on the coast. They are very fierce and war-like, and always fighting with each other."

"Well," said Frank Reade, Jr., "if we let them fight, they will eat each other up in short time."

"That would be a small loss to the world at large," said Captain Olsen.

"I think I would stop it, Frank," adjured Dr. Vaneyke.

"Very well!"

The young inventor went into the cabin. When he came out he had a coil of strange-looking twisted wire.

One end of this he flung over the rail of the air-ship.

Down it went, uncoiling as it fell. As soon as it struck the ice Frank went to the bow.

"Change the position of the air-ship, Pomp," he said, tersely. "Steer slowly two points to the north."

"A'right, Marse Frank."

Pomp hastened to obey the order. The air-ship drifted slowly to the northward.

This brought the trailing wire directly through the middle of the contending forces. The other end of it was connected with the dynamos.

Frank had on insulated gloves, however, so that he was all safe. He drew the wire skillfully along.

The current which passed through the wire was of terrific force. The young inventor smiled grimly.

"Two pints more, Pomp!" he cried. "Now let her drift."

All the voyagers were intently engaged in watching the move. Nearer drew the live wire.

A moment later it fell directly between the opposing forces. In their excitement they had not as yet seen the air-ship or the wire. The effect upon them wholly baffles adequate description.

CHAPTER VI.

INFORMATION GAINED—EASTWARD BOUND.

THE live wire fell directly between the contending band of Esquimaux.

The result was terrific. In a flash men were picked up and hurled in opposite directions as if with the hand of a giant.

Indeed, they were divided as if by the hand of a Jove. Backward they were thrown in the wildest confusion.

But even then the true cause was unsuspected. The air-ship was not seen nor was the live wire.

Therefore, both parties returned to the attack.

But in closing again, they came once more in contact with the wire. This time they saw as well as felt it.

Hurled back as with a giant hand, those of the Esquimaux sufficiently composed so to do, followed the direction of the mysterious wire with their eyes.

Then they saw the air-ship. The effect was magical.

Nothing could have given the astounded Arctic natives such a fright. Utterly demoralized not a man of them stood his ground.

They broke and fled in the wildest terror. Not until distant ice hummocks sheltered them did they pause.

Each band had fled in an opposite direction. They were now far apart, leaving quite a number of their dead and wounded upon the plain.

"Wonderful!" cried Captain Olsen, clapping his hands. "Why, Mr. Reade, you could whip the navies and armies of the world with your appliances. Simply send down a lightning bolt and kill them off."

"That is one reason why I would never divulge the secret of my air-ship," declared Frank.

"Indeed!"

"Unscrupulous parties would no doubt take advantage of it to conquer defenseless and harmless people and, much injustice and misery could be wrought."

"You are wise in that forethought, Mr. Reade," declared the captain, impressively, "but there are few who would pursue the conservative course you do."

"I believe it is the best for myself as well as the world at large," said Frank, quietly.

"Pomp, lower the ship."

The darky pilot obeyed orders and down the ship settled until it rested upon the ice plain.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., with Dr. Vaneyke

and Captain Olsen disembarked and went to the relief of the wounded Esquimaux.

Those who were alive watched the wonderful visitor from behind distant ice hummocks and wondered do doubt not a little upon their real character and mission.

But Frank paid little attention to them. His object was one of a humane sort, and he intended simply to minister to the wounded natives.

This was done. There were eight among the wounded, and their wounds were skillfully dressed, and they were made comfortable.

To Frank's surprise one of the Esquimaux addressed him in broken English:

"Hello, white man! Heap kind to poor Eskimo. Much good! How sail in air?"

"Jupiter!" gasped the young inventor in amazement. "Where did you learn to talk English?"

The Esquimaux smiled grimly.

"Me learn f'om white man. Come with ship—build igloo—live one year. All die! Learn Mayvayo how talk. Heap kind!"

Instantly Frank comprehended that he had discovered a valuable article in this English speaking Esquimaux.

"The deuce you say!" he exclaimed in amazement. "What is your name?"

"My Eskimo name Mayvayo. Dey Inglis man call me John."

"Good!" cried Frank. "You look like an honest fellow. Tell me what crew this was you speak of—what was the name of their ship?"

"Me think."

The Esquimaux tapped his forehead thoughtfully, and then suddenly replied with the greatest eagerness:

"Ah, come wif ship, but no go back. Left on ice. Come with small English kayak. Ship go way an' leave 'em, me remember."

"My soul!" ejaculated Frank, under his breath. "It may be the clew I am looking for. It is certainly a parallel case to that of Adrian North, if it is not the very same."

Then aloud he asked:

"Did all of them die?"

The Esquimaux looked thoughtful and then suddenly replied:

"No, one live; he go way with Esquimaux to hunt over there," pointing to the eastward. "He live; he all right."

"What was his name?"

But the stolid face of Mayvayo did not change.

"Me not know."

This was all that Mayvayo knew about the affair. But that he was on the track of Adrian North Frank felt sure.

But, of course, there was no manner of surety that the young castaway was alive. He might ere this have fallen a victim to the dangers of Arctic life.

But Frank concluded that Adrian would naturally strike out for the eastern coast, in the hope of striking some whaling vessel and thus getting passage home.

This belief seemed to be confirmed, when he was informed by Mayvayo that there were many bands and villages of Esquimaux in that direction.

"Look here, my good fellow," said Frank, brusquely, "you are not badly hurt. Your wound will heal in a few days. Don't you want to accompany me in my air-ship over this country until I can find the white man?"

Frank knew that it would be a decided advantage to have Mayvayo along. He could act

as interpreter, and also doubtless knew the country well.

Therefore he was pleased when the Esquimaux nodded his head eagerly.

"Yes, me go. Gib Mayvayo fire-stick he go."

"All right," agreed Frank. "You shall have it. Take him aboard, Barney and Pomp."

The Irishman and the darky helped the Esquimaux aboard the air-ship, where he was made comfortable.

As it was certain that the dead and wounded Esquimaux would now be looked after by their companions, the air-ship went on its way.

The surprise of Mayvayo nigh turned into terror as the air-ship rose, but he soon became accustomed to it.

For two days the Zephyr sailed over the frozen wastes. But on the morning of the third day Barney came on deck and said:

"If yez plaze, Mither Frank, the wather is entirely gone out av the dhrinkin' tanks, sor. For meself, whisky——"

"All right," interrupted the young inventor with a laugh. "Water is better for you, Barney. Well, it will be better for us to descend here, somewhere and refill the tanks. When we come to a fresh water lake or stream, let me know, Barney."

"All roight, sor, but if yez plaze, I think there's wan av thim jist undher us at this moment, sor."

"So?" exclaimed Frank. "Well, lower the ship and make ready to fill the tanks. You know how to do it."

"All roight, sor."

Pomp was ordered to lower the air-ship. The Zephyr settled down upon the surface of a vast frozen lake.

A hole was drilled in the thick ice, and the connecting pipe was laid, and the reservoir tanks were quickly filled.

But while Barney was recoiling and draining the pipe a short while later, a thrilling incident occurred.

The lake was deep set in the midst of mighty, high-crowned mountains. The heights were covered with fir-trees, and the vivid green against the white snow formed a striking contrast in colors.

When the air-ship first settled down, the entire region seemed deserted and devoid of life.

But now, suddenly and without warning there came from the woods, with savage yelps and howls, a large body of wolves.

The Arctic wolf is a beast to be dreaded, if in a herd.

Singly, he is an arrant coward, but in a troop like this they were a formidable array of foes.

Barney saw them coming, and with a yell sprang aboard the air-ship, drawing the hose pipe after him.

Frank Reade, Jr., was just about to give orders to Pomp to elevate the air-ship, when Gustaf Strom, the Swedish sailor, shouted frantically in his native tongue and pointed out over the ice-field.

With a chill of horror, Frank saw that Dr. Vaneyke and Captain Olsen were some distance out on the frozen lake.

They had seen the wolves and were running toward the ship.

But it was a certainty that they would be cut off.

They could not possibly reach the air-ship in time.

In the horror of the moment those on board the air-ship were speechless and unable to move.

Then Frank, the first to recover, made quick action.

He sprang into the forward cabin. Off from this was the magazine, and he quickly seized an electric bomb.

He was upon deck again in a twinkling.

The wolves would pass necessarily very near the air-ship.

Pomp caught the cue and started the helices.

The air-ship went up ten feet and then started forward to intervene between the wolves and the two imperiled men.

At the right moment Frank threw the bomb.

It struck fair in the midst of the pack. It seemed as if a terrible destroying hand was amongst them.

The wolves were several hundred in number, and heaps of them lay dead and mangled upon the plain after the terrific explosion.

The effect upon the wolves was most terrifying, and they were dispersed like chaff, cutting back to the forest with all speed.

The electric bomb had done good work. Dr. Vaneyke and Captain Olsen were saved.

At least, so Frank Reade, Jr., and the others believed.

But a thrilling surprise was in store. A startled cry pealed from the lips of all.

"Where are they?"

This question came spontaneously from the lips of all. At the moment it was most pertinent.

A moment before the two men had been seen flying across the ice toward the air-ship.

They certainly had not had time to reach it, but yet the startling fact was plain, that they were not anywhere to be seen.

CHAPTER VII.

RESCUE OF ADRIAN NORTH.

It was certain that the two men were nowhere to be seen.

But the mystery was quickly made clear. Suddenly Frank's keen eye caught a break in the surface of the ice. It was a large, square hole, a breathing space or air hole common in frozen bodies of water.

This had been skimmed over with thin ice, and had given way beneath the two fugitives.

They had gone down to the bottom of the lake in the icy water, but fortunately came up into the air instead of under the ice.

There they were, clinging to the edge of the ice.

It did not take Barney and Pomp long to run out and pull them out.

Then, half frozen, they were taken aboard the Zephyr and put to bed to avoid a chill.

It was decided to leave the spot at once and continue the quest for Adrian North.

Mayvayo, the English speaking Esquimaux, declared positively that they would soon come to an Esquimaux village, where it was possible that some tidings of the missing youth might be gained.

The Zephyr was soon once more on her aerial flight over the frozen wastes. Two days passed, during which Mayvayo kept a close watch of the country below.

Then at the close of the second day he cried: "Look! there be igloos; and kyaks in the sea. Eskimos everywhere."

This was true. Those on board the air-ship could look down upon an Esquimaux village far below and upon the shores of an arm of the sea.

The appearance of the air-ship over the Esquimaux settlement created a decided sensation.

The Arctic natives seemed to be thrown into a

state of the wildest confusion and excitement. They were seen running hither and thither in the utmost of terror.

The air-ship no doubt to them was synonymous with the supernatural, and their superstitious fears for a time got the best of them.

The air-ship settled down and rested upon the snow in the center of the igloo village.

But not an Esquimau was in sight. They had all in terror sought the cover of their ice huts and did not venture forth.

Of course the voyagers could not help but

After a time they ventured to approach the air-ship and were communicative and evidently social.

"Well," asked Frank after awhile, "what do you make of it, Mayvayo? Does he know anything about young North?"

Mayvayo's face shone in its rotundity and good humor as he made reply:

"Yees, meester. He can tell allee about young man. Him seen him here."

"Good!" cried Frank. "Is he here now?"

"No," replied the Esquimau.

"Where is he?"

"Hold on, Pomp! Close lever No. 4. Let the ship go down!"

All rushed to the rail at this startling command of the young inventor. The cause was quickly seen and a sensation created.

Just below was a defile between two icy peaks. In this defile a single occupant of a sledge was engaged in a deadly wrestle with an enormous white bear.

The bear had evidently pounced upon the sledge traveler from some retreat in the pass. It was a close hand to hand struggle, and the bear seemed in the supremacy.



Pomp headed him off, and the Celt was obliged to seek another quarter for safety. This led him toward the galley and the cook room. Pomp was close behind, and there was not time for him to change his course. Straight for the door he ran. But as he crossed the threshold retribution overtook him.

laugh at the comical state of affairs. But Frank said to Mayvayo:

"Call your people out and talk with them. Do you understand?"

"Ay, sir!" replied Mayvayo, quickly. "I vill do dat."

So the Anglicized Esquimaux interpreter stepped down from the air-ship's deck and shouted loudly some lingo in the Esquimaux style.

He repeated his words several times before any answer came. Then from one of the huts an Esquimau crept tremblingly out.

He answered Mayvayo in a guttural voice. The latter argued with him for some while.

The result was that gradually the natives came out of their seclusion and seemed to gain courage.

"No knowee where he am. Go way off data way wif dogs, an' no come back."

Mayvayo pointed to the eastward.

This was all that could be learned. Adrian had been at the Esquimaux village but a few weeks before.

But he had left with dogs and sledge for the east. It began to look as if the quest was to be a random one.

Frank did not dally at the Esquimau settlement. He had learned all he desired to know, and the Zephyr was soon again on its way.

But exciting adventures were close at hand. The Zephyr was sailing on at a fair rate of speed over the snow-covered wastes, when Frank suddenly turned to Pomp in the pilot-house and shouted:

The dogs were tearing and snapping at the big brute, but with no effect other than to irritate him.

Frank had seen the sledge traveler's peril, and also that he was a white man.

Of course the famous inventor was disposed to go at once to his relief.

As the air-ship settled down the white man looked up and saw it.

At first his face showed astonishment and then delight.

Then he shouted hoarsely, and Frank made reply:

"Have good courage! Hang right on and don't let the bear eat you up. We'll save you."

"All right," replied the traveler as he made redoubled efforts to hold his huge foe off. The air-ship struck the ground.

In an instant Frank Reade, Jr. and Barney went over the rail.

Both had their rifles and rushing up to the bear, Barney fired point blank. The shot struck the huge brute under the shoulder.

It penetrated to a vital spot, evidently the heart, for the bear reeled backwards and fell in a limp heap.

The next moment Frank and Barney were shaking hands with the stranger.

"Yes, I am Adrian North," he replied in answer to Frank's queries. "You are from civilization. Tell me of my people. I am an American."

"Your people our progressing," replied Frank. "America leads the world."

"You are a Yankee?"

"Yes."

"But—what wonderful invention is that which sails in the air?"

"That is the air-ship Zephyr," replied Frank.

"It is an invention of mine."

"And you—"

"I am Frank Reade, Jr."

Adrian passed a hand across his brow in a thoughtful manner.

"Ah, I remember," he said, suddenly. "You are an inventor. I have heard of you as a very famous man. But what are you doing in this desolate part of the world?"

"I have come in quest of you, partly," replied Frank.

"In quest of me?"

"Yes."

"But who sent you?"

"Your mother requested me to search for you, for she believed you yet alive. I am really on my way from north to south around the globe."

"My mother!" gasped Adrian North, joyfully; "then the dear woman is yet alive? May Heaven be praised! 'And she sent you for me? Ah! joy is once more mine. Let me get back home once more, and Wesley Hawkes had better tremble for—"

"Pardon me," interrupted Frank, "I know the whole story of your cousin's treachery. But you are weary and hungry, and you must come aboard the Zephyr and let us do something for you."

Adrian made no objection. The reaction had set in, and, although overjoyed, he was yet faint and weak with surfeit of excitement.

Aboard the Zephyr all went. There Adrian was given food and drink, after which he told the story of his experiences.

It was a tale fraught with suffering and woe and despair. But through all he had struggled blindly on, with the one consuming idea that some day he would get out of the accursed frozen region and back to civilization, to wreak justice upon Wesley Hawkes.

"You are likely to succeed," declared Frank, with a smile. "At least, Mr. North, we will see that you are put aboard a homeward bound ship."

"You are very kind," said Adrian, with emotion. "I trust you will get your reward some day."

"Do not speak of that," said Frank. "I am not working for such a thing. The consciousness of having helped to right a wrong is reward enough."

They were at the moment in the cabin. Adrian was making the most of a comfortable repast set before him by the skillful cook, Pomp.

It had been a long time since the Arctic cast-away had tasted such fare. It is needless to say that he enjoyed it.

When he had finished the meal he felt much refreshed and exceedingly jubilant in spirits. He engaged in conversation with Frank, and was thus occupied when a startling incident occurred.

Frank had neglected giving orders to Pomp to raise the air-ship and to continue the journey. Suddenly the darky rushed in, in a very excited state.

"Marse Frank!" he cried, breathlessly. "Dar am a hull milyun of queer lookin' people jes' a-comin' fo' dis yer ship, and dey am de worstest lookin' peoples I ever did see."

"Are they Esquimaux?" asked Frank, springing to his feet.

"No, sah, dey am not. Dey am de curiousest lookin' people I eber did see."

"Then raise the ship," cried Frank. "Go up one or two hundred feet. Just high enough for safety."

But before Pomp could execute the order there was a thundering report and the air-ship was shook from stem to stern.

CHAPTER VIII.

BACK TO CIVILIZATION.

FRANK READE, JR. went down in a heap with that shock, but he was quickly upon his feet and rushed out of the cabin upon the deck.

Adrian North followed him as did Pomp. All the others were already on deck.

An astounding sight met Frank's gaze. For a moment he was pale and fearful. But he quickly recovered himself.

The ship lay in the narrow pass with a huge pinnacle of ice right across her bow.

This huge piece of ice had tumbled down from the berg above, and striking the opposite wall of the pass had slid down and lodged directly across the air-ship.

Had it fallen full weight upon the Zephyr, the air-ship would have been surely crushed and badly damaged.

As it was, it was not badly damaged, but simply held fast. To attempt to raise the ship now was impossible.

Frank comprehended the seriousness of the situation at a glance.

There was no way to release the ship at once save by removing the ice pinnacle. In order to do this it would be necessary to either blow it to pieces with dynamite or cut it up with axes.

It would take some time to do this. Ordinarily this would have counted for little, but a mighty danger threatened.

Down the deep pass there were surging a vast number of people, the like of whom Frank had never seen before.

They were of giant stature, clad in barbarous-looking suits of fur, and carried long, bone-tipped spears and shields of raw hide.

A more fierce and war-like people our voyagers had never seen.

"By Jupiter!" cried Frank, "we must look out for them. To arms, everybody!"

"They must be enemies!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"And yet they are not Esquimaux."

"Still they seem to be natives of this region," ventured Captain Olsen.

"Certainly."

"A new race of people, perhaps."

"It certainly seems so. We have at least made a discovery. This may be of interest to science," said Dr. Vaneyke, thoughtfully.

"Exactly."

"Be jabbers, I'm thinkin' it's a mighty bad discovery fer us the same," put in Barney.

"Kidder I'sh, you'se jus' about right," chimed in Pomp. "Dey am de worstest-looking people I eber did see."

Both Barney and Pomp wanted to open fire on them. But Frank restrained them.

"They may be friendly to us," he declared. "It would be murder to kill any of them except in self-defense."

"Frank is right," declared Dr. Vaneyke. "Better wait and find out first whether they are friends or foes."

"But be jabbers any wan kin see that at a glance," averred Barney. "Divil a wan av thim but is arrumed."

"All right," said Frank, coolly. "Be you all in readiness. If I find that they are enemies I will give the order to fire."

The strange people had come to a halt a hundred yards distant.

They seemed to be holding a consultation. Frank walked to a conspicuous position at the ship's stern.

He saw that these natives of the Arctic, if such they were, were not of the Esquimaux type.

Their skin was of a lighter hue, their features more regular in contour and far more intelligent. But in this respect they were much more to be feared.

For their methods of warfare would necessarily be better, and this would mean a harder struggle to conquer them. But Frank, on the other hand, reckoned that they would be far easier to reason with.

He remained standing in the stern of the air-ship for some moments. The truce was recognized by the strange race and two of their number, stalwart fellows, came forward.

They began to address Frank in a strange unintelligible tongue. Of course the young inventor could not understand them.

In turn he addressed them separately in French, German, Italian and Spanish as well as English, but failed to make them understand his words.

Satisfied of the futility of the effort Frank began sign talk.

In this he succeeded better. By means of this crude method of conversation, he learned that they were not inclined to peaceful methods.

They demanded unconditionally the surrender of the ship. To this of course Frank bluntly replied in the negative.

It did not take the young inventor long to decide that it was quite useless to attempt to reason with them. There was only one way to treat with them, and that was swift, short and summary.

Such people were capable of being governed or controlled only by fear. Satisfied of this, Frank broke off the parley and returned to the main part of the ship.

A few moments later it was seen that the strange people were preparing to make an attack upon the air-ship.

Barney and Pomp had not been idle while Frank had been parleying with the foe.

They had drilled a hole under the ice pinnacle and inserted a small charge of dynamite. This it was hoped would shatter the ice and they would soon be able to clear the deck and leave the pass and the savage foe behind.

Just as Frank finished his parley Barney discharged the dynamite cartridge.

There was a sudden concussion, a shock, and the huge ice pinnacle tumbled into pieces.

Some of these rolled from the deck of the ship and some remained on the deck. Those remaining of such size as could be handled were quickly rolled from the deck.

Everybody caught the inspiration of the mo-

ment and worked liked beavers to clear the ship.

It was judged safest and best to avoid, if possible, any conflict with the strange natives. It was not by any means improbable that they might overrun the ship, and, getting the upper hand, massacre all on board.

Their numbers were vastly greater, and it would require a hard and stubborn battle to beat them off. Besides, great loss of life might result.

So with the greatest of effort the voyagers worked to relieve the ship of its burden of ice.

A fortunate delay in the attack of the strange natives gave them the time. In fact so well and quickly did they work that just as Barney was blowing up the remaining spur of the ice pinnacle the attack came.

Frank rushed into the cabin, and when he emerged he had two electric bombs in his hands.

They were an invention of his own, and deadly engines of warfare. He quickly hurled one of these up the pass in the face of the motley crew.

The result was fearful to witness.

The bomb exploded with a great roar. A perfect wall of fragments of ice rose in the pass and directly in the faces of the attacking party.

It checked them, and the next moment Frank shouted to Pomp:

"Raise the ship, Pomp!"

"A'right, sah!"

Pomp rushed into the pilot-house and turned the necessary lever. The air-ship rose quickly and like a huge bird. The effect upon the savage natives was wonderful and most comical.

They fled up the pass in the wildest of terror. The sight of the air-ship rising heavenward was too much for their superstitious fears.

The voyagers stood safely on the Zephyr's deck convulsed with laughter at the comical sight below.

But it remained in view but a few brief moments. The Zephyr's course was set to the southeast, and soon it was speeding rapidly away in the direction of the coast.

Adrian North paced the deck excitedly. It seemed to him that he could not speed home fast enough.

After all the years of solitude and of suffering in the Arctic wastes he was going home. It was a charming realization and a happy hope.

For days the Zephyr kept to the southward. Then one morning the dancing waters of the Atlantic burst into view.

Along the southward coast the air-ship held its way until the shores of Newfoundland were reached.

Here, safe and sound, in a little port, Adrian North, Captain Olsen and Gustaf Strom, the Arctic wanderers, were allowed to alight.

With tears of joy and warm expressions of gratitude, they gripped hands in farewell with Frank Reade, Jr.

They could not but regard him as the benefactor of their lives; their rescuer from certain death in the frozen latitudes.

It was like a transition from the Valley of Death to the bright, happy sunlight of the world of life, and they could not help but feel grateful to their preserver.

They took a final farewell with Mayvayo, the Esquimaux interpreter, of Barney and Pomp, Dr. Vaneyke and Frank Reade, Jr. Mayvayo had decided to settle again in civilization, and did not return to the Arctic with the Zephyr.

Then the Zephyr once more set out for her voyage around the world. This seemed her only mission now, but thrilling adventures were in store in the near future, and a new series of incidents were close at hand even more exciting than any yet experienced.

CHAPTER IX.

OVER THE NORTH POLE.

DUE north the Zephyr's course was set now. After a time the ice fields and glaciers of the frozen latitudes were once more encountered.

But the Zephyr had nothing to stop here for, so the air-ship kept on toward the North Pole.

Soon they were in the region of the long day which lasts half the year round. Many beautiful sights were seen, many phenomena witnessed.

To describe all of these would fill a mighty volume.

Therefore the writer will not attempt to do that, but simply pass over the journey to the North Pole, and bring the reader to the island of Nova Zembla and thence to the Siberian settlements near the delta of the river Lena.

One day, all were on deck, and passing over a Russian settlement in this extreme northern land of the greatest empire on earth, when Frank Reade, Jr., exclaimed:

"We are now in the land of despotism and of anarchy. No doubt these settlements are made up of exiles from Russia, poor unfortunate fellows who have been consigned to a fate worse than death, many times through the injustice of Russian law."

"Right!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "I have always been heartily in sympathy with the Siberian exiles."

"Look!" cried Frank, suddenly. "Does not that look like some mines in that range of hills? Yes, you can see the laborers as they go into the tunnel."

This was true.

A gang of men, clad in the garb of the Siberian convict were toiling at the mouth of a deep mine.

Near by were soldiers on guard and directing the convicts was a powerful, brutal looking Russian, with a knout or whip of knotted ropes in his hand.

With this he might at his pleasure castigate any of the wretches who did not obey the iron commands.

It was a pitiable sight to witness, and the voyagers gazed upon it with deep sympathy for the unfortunate ones.

"Many of these people have, no doubt, been exiled for the slightest of offenses," said Frank. "Ah, the despotism of monarchy."

"Be jabbers! talk about yez Russians," exploded Barney, "they're no worse off than the Irish to-day. On me wurrud, av it wasn't for England the Irish people wud be the proudest on the face av the earth."

"G'way dar, I'ish," sniffed Pomp. "De cullud people am jes' comin' to de front eber since ole Abe Lincoln proclaimed de emancipation fo' de slaves."

"Bejabbers, the naygurs ain't in it with the Irish," retorted Barney. "It's nothing but black-skinned monstrosities they are, anyway."

"Ki dar, I'ish, don' yo' say nuffin agin de cullud people. Dey am better dan de po' white trash I'ish, any day, my wo'd fo' it."

"Whurroo!" yelled Barney, jumping up and picking up a wet mop from the deck. "It's an insult to ould Oireland yez are givin' me, yez misfit black monkey, yez. Take that an' see how yez loike it fer yer imphudence."

Barney let the dirty wet rag fly at Pomp.

The darky was unable to get out of the way quick enough, and it took him fair in the mouth.

The dirty water filled his mouth, and for a moment choked and blinded him. He pulled the dirty swab from his face and, mad as a hornet, rushed at Barney.

But that nimble practical joker, though convulsed with laughter, dodged and started for the cabin.

But Pomp headed him off, and the Celt was obliged to seek another quarter for safety.

This led him toward the galley and the cook room.

Pomp was close behind, and there was not time for him to change his course. Straight for the door he ran. But as he crossed the threshold retribution overtook him.

Inadvertently Pomp had left a sack of flour opened just at the threshold. The darky had meant to empty it into a bin in the cook-room, but had been called away upon some other duty before being able to do so.

As a result, at the threshold Barney ran against this.

He stumbled and fell in a heap over the sack. In some manner it became entangled in his legs, and the flour fell over him in a white cloud.

Ears, eyes, nose and mouth were completely filled by the thin, powdery material. In fact, he looked like a white mountain, as he lay in a heap with the flour piled on top of him.

Pomp came to a halt on the threshold. His anger vanished, and he thought no more of revenge. Convulsed with laughter, the darky fairly rolled over in his merriment.

Barney crawled out from the heap of flour sputtering, mad and disgusted. He made a dash at Pomp again, but at this moment the electric gong rang "on deck."

This was a signal which could not be disregarded.

Pomp started for the deck, and Barney proceeded to shake the flour from himself so that he could do the same.

When Pomp appeared on deck, Frank and Dr. Vaneyke were at the rail. They seemed to be in a very excited state.

"Pomp," cried Frank, "go to the pilot-house and wait for orders."

"A'right, sah."

Pomp obeyed, and in a moment the order came to lower the ship.

While the two skylarkers were having their ruction in the cook-room, Frank and Dr. Vaneyke had been accorded a most thrilling spectacle.

Gazing down the mountain road below, they had seen a man, clad in convict's garb, riding a horse furiously over a ridge. Behind him were a score of mounted Russian soldiers.

"It is one of the exiles, and he is trying to escape!" declared Frank.

"You are right," agreed Dr. Vaneyke. "May he succeed!"

At once they became mightily interested in the escaping convict and his race for life.

The soldiers were evidently after his life, for at every opportunity for an aim they fired at him.

"That is cruel!" cried Dr. Vaneyke. "Must we see the poor fellow shot down in such a barbarous manner?"

"It is inhuman!" agreed Frank. "But what can we do?"

The two men exchanged glances.

"It is an act of mercy to save that life," said

the doctor, seriously. "Why should we not do it?"

"Do you think they really mean to take his life?"

"Of course, they never spare the life of one escaping convict. To attempt to make an escape is death."

"Horrible!"

"So indeed it is. But, such is Russian despotism."

"We may not have the right to interfere."

"Why not? Has not any one the right to save human life?"

"But this man may be a murderer?"

"It is not likely."

Frank was irresolute but a moment. The air-ship was going in the same direction as the horsemen below.

Of course the Zephyr had no trouble in outspeeding the horses. Then Frank made up his mind. He rang the gong which called Pomp on deck.

The race between the escaping prisoner and his pursuers was becoming very close and exciting.

Frank gave the order for the air-ship to descend until a couple of hundred feet, above the earth.

At this moment the prisoner and the pursuers as well caught sight of the air-ship.

All showed great surprise, but none of the horses were pulled up. The prisoner seemed to become more terrified, while the soldiers looked upon the air-ship as some new invention of the Czar's, and consequently in sympathy with them.

But suddenly the horse ridden by the prisoner seemed to give signs of flagging. The soldiers pressed forward.

Frank smiled grimly and then threw a long coil of wire over the rail.

He donned a pair of insulated gloves, then connected the wire with an adjunct of the dynamos. In a moment a powerful current was seething over the wire.

Down into the roadway fell one end of the wire.

The horseman did not see it, but suddenly they met with an astounding surprise.

As they came in contact with the wire, horses were prostrated, riders thrown and stunned into insensibility.

Those behind fell over those in front, and in a twinkling the whole troop of soldiers were brought to a halt in a demoralized heap in the middle of the road.

Then Frank sprang to the pilot-house, and with his own hand directed the course of the air-ship.

The Zephyr settled down like a bird. Just at that moment the horse ridden by the escaping convict fell.

CHAPTER X.

DEFEATING THE SOLDIERS OF THE CZAR.

Down into the road settled the air-ship. The prisoner thrown from his horse lay in a stunned heap.

The Russian soldiers had not yet recovered themselves from the effect of the deadly wire.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney sprang from the air-ship's deck. In a moment they had lifted the senseless form of the exile aboard.

Then just as the soldiers recovered and came thundering up the air-ship shot up into the air.

Up it went for a thousand feet. The astounded and enraged soldiers could do nothing but shake their fists and swords at the air-ship and yell in impotent rage.

Their bird had escaped them, and the human-

ity of an American had intervened to save one poor victim from the despotism of a cruel Czar.

The four voyagers were now wholly oblivious of the action of the soldiers below, giving their whole time to the resuscitation of the rescued man.

As he lay senseless upon the air-ship's deck he was seen to be a man of more than ordinary intelligence and refinement if the features were to be accepted as an index.

In spite of his tattered prison garb he was seen to be a man of wonderfully handsome figure and the general bearing of one accustomed to a mode of life above the common-place.

His age could not have been past thirty.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Dr. Vaneyke, "what do you suppose they exiled this chap for? He don't look like a criminal."

"Neither do I believe him to be such," declared Frank. "If I am any judge of human nature, he is a gentleman reared."

"So say I."

"I have heard of many cases of people in high standing being sent to Siberia through the evil machinations of political or social foes."

"There is no doubt of that."

"This may be such a case."

"I am inclined to believe it."

"But we shall not know until we have succeeded in resuscitating the poor fellow. Ah, he shows signs of life."

Frank had washed the blood from his face, and the blow was shown to be but an abrasion of the skin and a slight concussion.

There was no fracture, and no doubt but that the temporary effects of the wound were but a spell of unconsciousness.

At this moment the exile began to show signs of life.

He moved his head, his eyelids quivered and his lips moved.

After a moment he opened his eyes and looked about him. He was too weak for a moment to move, but he managed to whisper:

"Where am I? What is this?"

But he spoke in the Russian tongue and none on board understood this.

"Phwat did he say?" queried Barney. "Shure, it sounded loike Eyetalian."

"He spoke in his native tongue," said Frank.

"I don't know it and we are up a stump if he cannot speak French."

The famous inventor at once bent down and replied in French.

"Pardon, Monsieur! We do not know the Russian language. We are Americans. Do you speak French?"

Instantly the exile's eyes lit up quickly.

"Oui Monsieur!" he replied. "I talk French as well as my own tongue. I am then among friends?"

"Depend upon it," declared Frank, earnestly.

"Where—where are the soldiers?"

"They are a thousand feet beneath us at this moment."

The exile looked puzzled, but pressing one hand over his aching brow, he muttered:

"Ah, I can see it now. The reeking, filthy mine, the brutish slave-driver, the bastinado! Ah, to think that I should come to such as this, and through the villainy of my bosom friend."

The voyagers heard every word plainly. All understood French and knew what the exile had said.

Frank looked up significantly.

"I knew it," he said in an aside; then he addressed the exile.

"You must not exert yourself until your strength returns. Have no fear, you are among friends. You can tell your story when you

recover. I may as well tell you that you are aboard the air-ship Zephyr, and that none of your foes can reach you at present."

"So kind, monsieur!" cried the exile in a fevered way. "Accept the everlasting gratitude of Myles Zalinska. Believe it, I am an honorable man, though an exile to Siberia."

"We will believe it," replied Frank; "but you must not exert yourself at present. Keep perfectly calm and sleep for a while."

The exile, who had called himself Myles Zalinska, bowed his head and then complied by closing his eyes.

In a short while exhausted Nature had asserted itself and he was asleep.

The air-ship had, during this time, remained motionless a thousand feet above the earth.

What was going on down below nobody knew.

Pomp advanced to the rail to look over. The rattle of fire-arms was heard and the darky reeled back.

"Glory fo' goodness!" he yelled. "Ise done got hit dat time."

This was true.

A stream of blood was coursing down the darky's face.

In an instant the others had sprung to Pomp's side. But the darky did not fall.

"Och hone, it's kilt entoirely he is," cried Barney, in distress.

"G'way dar, I'ish!" cried Pomp, waving his arms. "I jes' ain't one bit hurted. It am jes' a lily bit ob a scratch."

This was true. The bullet had fortunately just burned the skin from the darky's forehead, making a flesh wound of little consequence.

Meanwhile the soldiers were firing rapidly into the air.

At that height the bullets reached the air-ship and pattered like hail against the metal-bottom of the Zephyr.

"We'll soon put an end to that," said Frank, grimly. He went into the cabin. When he emerged he held in his hand a small bomb.

It was of his own invention, and the nature of its construction was a secret of his own.

Frank had several kinds of electric bombs on board. One was of an explosive and most deadly kind.

But this was one composed of a powerful chemical substance, the overpowering fumes of which would either drive back or stupefy an army of men.

The famous inventor had no desire to slaughter the soldiers below. It would have been an unnecessary taking of human life.

He went to the rail and threw the bomb over.

It went out of sight in a twinkling. Only one more volley came from the soldiers, and then the voyagers looked over the rail to behold an amusing spectacle.

The entire body of cavalry were in scattered and full retreat.

The bomb had struck the earth, and exploding, the fumes had proved far too powerful for the foe.

The way they made off was most amusing as well as surprising.

In less time than it takes to tell it they were far beyond range. Barney and Pomp laughed uproariously, and even Frank and Dr. Vaneyke joined in the hilarity.

As the position was not a safe one it was decided to change.

This became all the more imperative in the fact that a detachment of artillery was now seen coming up the road from the town.

This suddenly swung into position and the next moment a shell came flying through the air.

It exploded just to the right of the air-ship. The shock was tremendous.

The Zephyr pitched and leaped wildly and seemed likely to be turned clean over like a ship at sea.

But she managed to retain her equilibrium fortunately, though pieces of the shell shot across the deck and all around her.

Fortunately, however, she was not struck. Frank Reade, Jr. and Barney were prostrated upon the deck and Pomp and Dr. Vaneyke were badly shaken up.

As for Zalinska the exile, he was awakened and so thoroughly startled that he sprang up and came rushing out on deck.

"My God! What has happened, monsieur?" he cried, wildly. "Have we fallen to the earth?"

"No," replied Frank, quickly, "the enemy sent a shell after us that was all. Go back to your bunk as quickly as you can."

Pomp had sprung to the pilot house and turned lever No. 10. The air-ship went shooting up through space.

In a very few moments it was far beyond the reach of rifle balls or cannon shot.

The foe fired shells repeatedly, trying to reach the air-ship, but they might as well have spared themselves the trouble.

The Zephyr was far beyond range and the voyagers for the timesafe.

But Zalinska could not be induced to go below deck again.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EXILE'S STORY.

"I AM am all right now," he declared firmly. "I cannot stay below there any longer. I feel the need of air."

"But you should not over exert yourself," said Dr. Vaneyke in protest.

"I feel quite sure of myself," declared the exile with a smile, "have no fears for me, friends."

He arose and went to the rail with quick, firm step.

Certainly this seemed to bear him out in his declaration. Nothing more could be said under the circumstances.

Myles Zalinska gazed from the deck of the air-ship upon the country below, and then clapped his hands in seeming transport.

"Wonderful!" he cried, transferring his gaze to the swiftly revolving helices. "Nothing in the line of inventions can surpass this. Truly you Americans are a wonderful people!"

"I am glad that you have so favorable an impression of us," said Frank with a smile.

"How can I help it?" cried Zalinska, with earnestness. "You are the most wonderful people on earth!"

"Russia and America have always been friends."

"True. Russia is a great country, but it cannot compare with America in many points."

"Indeed!" said Frank, politely, "that is a frank statement."

"I mean in form of government more especially. Russia is ruled by despotism, while in America the poorest peasant has his say in public matters."

"We are proud of our form of government," said Frank, "and I agree with you that Russia is sadly handicapped by despotic rule."

"Understand me," said Zalinska, impressively. "I am not an anarchist, and I have always been a faithful follower of the Czar."

"But my eyes have not deceived me and I have witnessed injustice and wrong which I am sure could not have been done under the voice of the people."

"Yes, Russia is a great nation, but it is under a cloud. All the prayers of her right-minded people have not succeeded in righting the matter as yet."

"Have courage," said Frank, "the day will come yet."

"Which is my hope and prayer."

"It will be granted."

The Zephyr was now fully two miles in the air. The atmosphere was chilly and raw and overcoats were brought from the cabin.

Frank did not give directions to start the propeller. The air was still and there was little danger of drifting far.

Frank had no notion of leaving the vicinity of the Siberian mines until after he had had a consultation with Zalinska.

The exile now seated himself near the rail. The others grouped about him, and there, two miles above the earth he recited a thrilling tale to his rescuers.

"I am an exile from my native land," he said with a ring of sadness in his voice. "Few of you perhaps know what that means."

"If you were in my place, however, you would understand my feelings."

"There is no punishment equal to banishment. It is well to say that the world is wide and that there is room for all."

"But on the other hand there is but one land in which we can truly feel at home and truly be happy."

"That is the land of our nativity among the people of our own kind and of our birth. This is indisputable."

"I was happy in Moscow, my family is one of the noblest in Russia. One year ago I was high in the favor of the Czar and of my people."

"But popularity is a fatal proclivity in Russia. It was not long before this was well demonstrated to me."

"I formed the acquaintance of Olga Ravetsky, princess in her own right and beautiful, tender and true."

"We fell in love with each other, Olga and I, and we engaged ourselves to be married. It was the most sublime moment of my life."

"Our engagement was announced. It was not until then that I learned of the existence of a rival."

"Ivan Mykowsky, Minister of the Interior and near to the Czar, had formed a liking for Olga. He had once proposed to her and had been rejected."

"Infuriated to learn that I was the successful suitor, he would not rest easy until he had schemed for and won revenge."

"He registered a black oath that Olga Ravetsky should never be mine."

"He took pains to insult me at an evening party. I challenged him and a duel was arranged."

"By superior sword play I disarmed him and held his life at my mercy. Had I smothered my merciful disposition and run him through, all my suffering since would have been spared."

"But I gave the wretch his life. I made the mistake of my life."

"Instead of gratitude and repentance, he only conceived greater hatred for me. Very soon he had a villainous plan afoot."

"In the city there was a Nihilist society known as the Black Z's. Their emblem was a black letter Z stamped upon the arm."

"Whenever a man was arrested with the letter Z stamped upon his arm, he was immedi-

ately recognized as an enemy to the Czar and promptly sentenced to be shot.

"One night, coming home at a late hour from an evening party, I was set upon by a gang of masked men."

"Before I could beat them off I was rendered unconscious by a drug. When I came to I was lying half naked in the gutter."

"I was not badly hurt and made my way home safely. But not until I arrived there did I fully understand the full meaning of the attack upon me."

"Then I discovered upon my left arm stamped in black indelible, and never to be removed, the letter Z."

Zalinska with this rolled up his sleeve above the elbow joint.

There, plainly enough stamped upon the white skin, was a perfectly formed but ugly-looking letter Z.

"You can see it, friends," he declared, "and you can imagine my sensations upon making the discovery."

I was wholly at a loss to understand it. It seemed as if it was a trick to make me a member of the Z. society against my will.

"Naturally I was deeply angered. I thought of calling in the police."

"Then it occurred to me that by so doing I would be only courting my fate. My story would hardly be credited."

"No, I told myself it would be safer far to keep forever quiet on the subject. I did not dream of the real purpose of the villains who had so foully branded me."

"I went at once to Olga and told her all. She was horror struck and at once threw herself into my arms."

"Let us leave the country," she cried. "We will be safer in some other clime. I feel sure that it is a dark scheme against your life."

"But, recklessly, I refused to view it in that light."

"I have no enemies that I need fear," I declared, foolishly, "they can never prove me a traitor to the Czar."

"Oh, you do not know the extent of the villainy abroad," my love pleaded, "I fear for you, Myles, I fear for you."

"Yet I would not be convinced. Two days passed. The letter Z yet remained upon my arm."

"No effort of mine would remove it. In vain I tried to accomplish that end. For the first fear seized me when two of the Czar's officers came to my house."

"They had a requisition for my body from the Czar. There was no disobeying the royal mandate."

"I was obliged to go with the officers. It was then that I began to thoroughly understand the game."

"Led into the presence of the Czar and a couple of magistrates, I was closely questioned about my connections with the Z society."

"Then my person was searched and one of the officers bared my arm. Alas! there was the tell-tale brand."

"In vain I tried to explain all. I told the story of my experience, and how the brand came there."

"They listened respectfully, but only laughed at my protestations. I was sentenced to be shot at twenty paces."

"I was thrown into a dungeon that night. The next day I was led forth upon the field to face a squad of soldiers."

"But just as the death line was drawn up,

a courier rode onto the field. He had a message, which was read aloud.

"Olga was a dear friend of the Czarina, and through her frantic influence the death sentence was commuted to banishment to Siberia."

"Before I left Moscow a note reached me from Olga, in which she protested her love, and declared that she was coming to Siberia to share the exile with me."

"I have lived in that delirious hope ever since. If it were not for hope, truly the heart would break."

"I have never ceased to believe that my vindication would come, and that I would secure a full pardon."

"But I believed that my only chance lay in escape. That was why I slipped the guard and was making for freedom when you came to my rescue."

The exile paused here, somewhat in fatigue.

CHAPTER XII.

POMP AND BARNEY ARGUE.

THE Zephyr's crew had listened with deepest interest to this powerful recital of wrong and suffering.

Their sympathies could not but be with the exile.

All showed this by crowding nearer and asking sympathetic questions.

"Then you believe that Ivan Mykowsky was at the bottom of all this?" asked Frank, with interest.

"I do," replied Zalinska. "In fact, I am very sure of it. His purpose was to disgrace and exile me."

"Then he believed that Olga, with everybody else, would turn against me. This would, he fancied, increase his chances of winning Olga's hand."

"But she, bless her, has remained true to me through all. Oh, if I could only prove my innocence!"

"Perhaps we can help you," suggested Frank.

An eager, hopeful light leaped from the exile's handsome eyes.

"Oh, if you only could!" he cried. "God would bless you for it! Do you think that you could?"

"Perhaps so."

"In what way?"

Frank was thoughtful a moment.

"There must be a way," he said, slowly.

"Let me see. Did you not say that Olga was about to make her way to Siberia to join you in your exile?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps she is here."

"Ah! that was the hope which led me to escape from that horrible mine."

"If she can be found we will take her aboard the air-ship," said Frank, kindly. "Then we will put you down in any part of the world you may desire."

"Will you?" cried the exile, eagerly. "Oh, you are noble and kind. May God bless you for this."

The discussion ended here for a time. Darkness was fast coming on, and the air-ship was allowed to descend into a warmer atmosphere.

Here it was allowed to drift, for it was not desired to leave the vicinity of Plousky, which was the name of the Siberian town.

The night passed without incident.

Once Frank turned the rays of the powerful search-light down upon the fortifications below.

He saw the sentries give the alarm, heard the reveille, and saw the men rush to quarters.

An artillery volley was fired into the air, but none of the shells came near enough to the Zephyr to do any harm.

Morning came at last.

To those in the fort below the Zephyr looked like a mere speck far up in the blue ether.

With the coming of the day Frank was quick to hit upon a plan of action.

It was decided to descend and take a good survey of the fortifications of Plousky. Then the air-ship was to set out toward Moscow.

Upon the Siberian thoroughfare, always thronged with exiles and officers of the empire, it was hoped to find Olga in her pilgrimage to the place of imprisonment of her lover.

No one was more excited or wrought up over the matter than Zalinska himself.

He paced the air-ship's deck with feverish interest, and it seemed as if he would go mad with excitement.

The air-ship left Plousky and was soon sailing over the Siberian plains to the westward.

Below the highway could be plainly seen. At times bands of horsemen and wagon trains were encountered.

Then there would appear a half hundred or more wretched exiles in chains, and led like sheep by armed men.

The voyagers of the Zephyr gazed upon the scene with powerful emotions of pity and sympathy.

It was Frank Reade, Jr.'s impulse to cast down upon the cruel guards, the servants of a despotic Czar, a bomb or two, and thus liberate the afflicted victims.

But sober second thought quickly taught him that this would never do.

He was an American citizen in a foreign land. Such a thing as the killing of the soldiers of the Czar, could not but result in international complications of a nature so serious, that Frank could not for a moment consider the plan.

Therefore the air-ship kept peaceably on. Its appearance always created a furore of excitement. The astonished travelers and guards below would wave their arms and shout and yell lustily.

In nearly every case the Russian guards would fire at the air-ship.

But their bullets did no harm and the air-ship kept on.

But Barney and Pomp were intensely irritated at what they considered the lack of courtesy upon the part of the guards.

"Bejabers, they moight be a bit more civil," averred Barney, positively. "Av' we sarved thim right we'd give them a bomb or two as wud blow thim to smithereens."

"Golly, dat am a suttin' fac', I'ish," agreed Pomp, rolling his eyes upward. "I jes' would like to do dat fing m'self."

"It wouldn't do," protested Frank. "Don't you even fire a rifle at them. The United States would have a Russian war on its hands at once."

So the two faithful servitors were obliged to content themselves with simply disparaging comments upon the incivility of the Russian bear, and the undeniable ability of the United States to whip Russia out of her boots.

"By golly, yo' jes' see what a navy Uncle Sam am gettin'," declared Pomp with distended eyeballs. "It am jes' a good one yo' kin bet."

"Be jabers it's allowing to the gude ould Irish stock as has gone over to Ameriky from the ould sod," declared Barney, positively.

"Huh! what yo' say dat fo'?" snapped Pomp. "Bekase it's so, nagur. Wud yez luk at the

truth av it. Iverywhere yez go yez will find Irish workmen in the United Sthates. Av ye'll take a census av the min what built thim foine cruisers av Uncle Sam's, yez'll foind that Murphys, an' McGuires, an' McIntiores, an' O'Sheas predominate. Av it ain't the Irish people what upholds Ameriky it ain't no other."

Everybody laughed at this convincing argument of Barney's.

"There's no doubt about the number of Mc's and Murphys in the land of the free," said Frank with a laugh, "and they seem to be increasing all the while."

But Pomp's eyes gleamed roguishly. He was bound to turn the tables upon his friend and fellow joker.

"Huh!" he declared; "dat don' stan' fo' nuffin' tall. Jes' yo' pause to reflec', I'ish, dat when dey come ober to Ameriky dey come to a differunt land, an' dey am I'ish people no mo', but American citizens. It am America an' de Americans what shows de I'ish people what tings am, an' den, ob co'se, dey kin go ahead all right. Dat's easy enuff."

Barney was right on his temper in a moment.

"Whurroo," he cried excitedly. "Wud yez say the loikes av that to me, nagur? I'll have yez to understand that Ireland is just as civilized as Ameriky is to-day an' that the Irish people are as civilized as anny American an' don't yez fergit it?"

"Sho, dar I'ish," retorted Pomp. "If dat am a fac' why don' de I'ish people stay at home den. What fo' dey come yer whar tings am no bettan, eh?"

"Be jabers, it's thick-headed yez ar'," exploded Barney. "Don't yez know that England has the yoke—"

But Barney did not finish. A great cry came from the bow of the air-ship. Then along the deck the exile Zalinska came reeling and crying in French.

"Down, go down for God's sake! We must save her!"

Frank Reade, Jr. and the others sprang to the rail. They looked down upon a sight below which nigh froze the blood in their veins.

Frank Reade, Jr. sprang into the pilot-house.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIGHTING THE ROBBERS—THE ABDUCTION.

ZALINSKA had been at his post in the bow of the air-ship, keeping watch of the country below.

He lived in the constant hope of seeing the cavalcade in which his love Olga would be visible, swing into view.

After a time the air-ship hung over high hills broken by rocky passes.

Through one of these passes the Siberian highway led. Suddenly the exile's gaze became fixed upon a scene which gave him an awful thrill of horror.

For a moment he was tempted to throw himself over the air-ship's rail.

In the pass were a handful of men, in the center of whom was a lady mounted upon a prancing black horse.

In the rear was a small pack train.

It was evidently a party of travelers, and they were defending their lives against a party of robbers or brigands, half a hundred in number.

As it seemed, there could be but one result. The brigands seemed to have the upper hand, and the travelers were certain to succumb.

This spectacle alone was enough to fire the ardent and chivalrous blood of the gallant Russian exile.

But the sight of the lady in the center of the bodyguard was what thrilled him the most for in that moment he had recognized her.

It was Olga Ravetsky. The young Russian princess seemed brave and self-possessed in the midst of her awful peril.

She even directed in a cool and plucky manner the movements of her bodyguard. The fight which followed was a bitter one.

But the appearance of the air-ship put a new face upon matters at once.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke gazed down upon the thrilling scene for a moment with the keenest of interest.

Then Frank turned and shouted to Barney to lower the air-ship.

The huge propeller was reversed a trifle, until the air-ship was directly over the spot, then it began to descend.

The appearance of the air-ship above the ignorant brigands had a startling effect upon them.

For aught they knew this was some terrible engine of warfare sent by the czar to punish them and terror seized them.

The battle was broken up for a moment, the brigands beating a startled retreat.

This seemed a desirable point scored in favor of the travelers, but now to the dismay of Zalinska the body-guard also seemed to become impressed with the same superstitious fear as the brigands.

They broke ranks, and started to flee to the cover of rocks about.

In vain Princess Olga tried to restrain them and bring them back to duty. They would not heed her commands.

So that the princess was left quite alone for a moment. Zalinska was a very angry and excited man.

"Fools!" he yelled at the recreant guard. "Come back and stand by your mistress. We are your friends."

Olga must have heard her lover's voice, for she looked up with a sudden start. Seeing this Zalinska leaned over the rail and tried to hail her.

It was possible that in his great excitement he might have tried to leap over the rail but for Frank and Dr. Vaneyke.

He surely would have done so but for their efforts a moment later, when a most thrilling incident occurred.

Suddenly from the brigand ranks a tall, dashing fellow, evidently their leader, and mounted on a pure white steed, dashed down the pass upon the princess.

In a twinkling he had grasped the bridle rein of her horse, and thrown him upon his haunches.

Then before Olga could recover herself, the daring brigand boldly and skillfully plucked her from the saddle bodily, and in spite of her struggles was away up the mountain side.

Before those on board the air-ship could fairly make up their minds to act, the daring captor had vanished into the depths of a dark forest, the foliage of which was so dense that from the deck of the air-ship it could not be penetrated by human gaze.

"Save her!" shrieked Zalinska, like a maniac. "Save her, I say! Fools! don't you see that she has fallen into bad hands!"

"Calm yourself, sir," said Frank, in his best French. "You will gain nothing by this action. I adjure you to keep perfectly cool."

"What, and let her go to her fate in such a way?"

"She shall not come to harm. We will rescue her."

With an effort Zalinska composed himself. But he paced the deck like a maniac, as the air-ship's course was directed over the forest in quest of the abductor.

No further attention was paid to the brigands or the cowardly body guard.

None of the latter seemed disposed to go to the rescue of their mistress. In fact, they were turning about to beat a cowardly retreat in a homeward direction.

The air-ship passed over the dense forest, but no sign of the abductor and his prize was to be seen.

The most assiduous search was made. It was impossible to alight anywhere, the trees were so thick in foliage.

The forest was a large and dense one, covering many square miles. The air-ship hovered over it for some time in a futile quest.

All this while Zalinska was in a terrible frantic state.

He begged piteously to be allowed to descend. But Frank knew better than to permit him to do this.

The exile was in a distracted and irresponsible state of mind.

It would have been almost suicidal for him to have descended into the midst of his foes. They would quickly have cut him down.

Night was coming on rapidly.

It had been a futile quest for the robber chief and his fair prisoner. The dense woods doubtless still held them.

At nightfall Zalinska was in a calmer frame of mind and better able to discuss the situation.

"I know these woods," he said calmly. "They are a part of the White Bear forest, and there is but one main highway through them."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Do you know where that comes out?"

"Yes, at the outpost of Batakan—just ten leagues to the westward."

"Ah, then will not the robber chief come out at that point?"

"It may be. Yet he may have a retreat in the forest."

"That is true," agreed Frank, "but I would suggest that we go to the outlet of the road and there wait for the appearance of the rascal. If he does not come out, we can then plan to invade the forest and search for him."

Zalinska was silent a moment.

"It is our only move," he said finally, with desperation. "But I fear we will not succeed."

"We will do the best we can," said Frank, simply.

It was after dark when the Zephyr reached the outlet of the road through the forest.

But the moonlight brightly glistened its rays down upon the landscape and made objects below quite plain.

The air-ship hovered over the edge of the forest.

Suddenly from its arches a horse and rider appeared. The rider carried an object over the saddle which close scrutiny showed was a human form.

It was no doubt the robber chief and his prey.

He did not look up or show that he knew of the presence of the air-ship. Straight on he galloped across the clear country.

A bright light gleamed in the distance. It was one of the lights of Batakan. Before the air-ship could overtake him the rider had galloped into the yard of an inn and leaped from his horse.

He carried the form of the insensible or drugged captive into the inn.

The air-ship was now right over the inn. From its decks it had been quite easy to see all.

Frank did not make use of the search-light, for the moonlight was bright enough for all purposes.

Strange enough, none of the inn people saw the air-ship in the sky above or were aware of its presence.

Frank had decided upon a plan of action and now caused Barney to lower the air-ship.

There was an open field not far from the inn and into this the Zephyr descended. But as soon as the air-ship touched the ground Zalinska without a moment's warning leaped over the rail and rushed toward the inn.

The next moment he vanished into the yard. Frank was furious and vainly called to him to return.

"Reckless fellow!" cried the young inventor, "he will spoil my plans. It don't look now as if I should succeed."

However, Frank deputized Dr. Vaneyke to remain guard upon the air-ship. Then with Barney and Pomp heavily armed he descended to the ground and started for the inn.

The little party from the Zephyr had entered the inn-yard when they heard the sound of loud voices from the main room of the structure, or what would be properly called the office in the American hotel.

A window was near and the three voyagers crept up to it.

Looking in through the glass they beheld a stirring sight and which thrilled them deeply.

CHAPTER XIV.

FACE TO FACE.

UPON leaving the air-ship Zalinska had rushed into the office or lounging room of the inn.

Here were gathered a group of men whose garb showed them of various occupations from the student to the soldier.

Among them Zalinska saw the robber-chief who had carried Olga off in such an uncere-monious fashion.

Without a moment's hesitation the intrepid exile rushed upon him.

"Dog of a thief!" he cried, excitedly, "persecutor of women and robber on the main highways, I know you."

The robber-chief recoiled and turned a trifle pale. But he managed to recover and say:

"Stand off! I do not know you, dog of a slave."

"But I do you!" thundered Zalinska, "and I demand that you deliver up the lady you so foully abducted a few hours ago."

The crowd in the lounging-room were electrified. The words of the two men had thrown them into a state of the most intense excitement.

"Listen!" cried Zalinska, fiercely, turning to the crowd. "This dog whom you see before you is guilty of a heinous crime. He with his followers set upon the body guard of Princess Olga Ravetsky traveling through the White Bear Pass. His men had routed the body guard, and this wretch has carried the lady away in a drugged state upon his horse. She is now in this inn."

"Hear the story!" cried one of the excited crowd. "He is a woman stealer."

"Release the princess!"

"Hang the dog of an outlaw to the inn post!" These were the cries which went up, and the robber chief had need to feel a trifle nervous.

But with pale face though wonderful self-command, he said:

"Listen, friends; this is all a hoax. This man is lying to you. He is my rival in love. I

have sought to cut him out and the lady went with me of her own free will. He seeks to make me black in your eyes, but I am an honorable man."

"Who are you?" asked one of the crowd.

"I am Alexander Mavsky, of Irkutsk, and I am a fur trader. I can prove to-morrow in a hundred ways that I am an honorable man."

Penetrating eyes were turned upon Zalinska. The latter's face was mobile.

"More than that," continued Mavsky. "I could tell a larger lie than my rival here and which would yet come nearer the truth. I

other, recoiled and a black oath of surprise dropped from his lips.

The red beard and false wig did not suffice to hide his identity from his uncompromising foe, the man he had wronged, Miles Zalinska.

"So you know me?" he hissed.

"Yes," replied Zalinska, rigidly.

"How did you escape?"

"By the aid of kind friends, who are also for-eigners."

"Ah, they have dared to interfere with justice in the realm of the Czar——"

"Hold! They have interceded to thwart in-

It generally ended in a duel of some sort, and this mode of settling grievances was countenanced by the law.

"Let them fight it out," said one bewhiskered Russian.

"A love affair! Bah! we never quarrel over women on the Steppes," said a Cossack, in disgust.

"I'll wager a kopack on the one who wins," said another, derisively.

But Zalinska was deeply in earnest when he declared that he would square accounts with his foe.



In a twinkling he had grasped the bridle rein of her horse, and thrown him upon his haunches. Then before Olga could recover herself, the daring brigand boldly and skillfully plucked her from the saddle bodily, and in spite of her struggles was away up the mountain side.

might denounce him as an exile, just escaped from the mines of Plovsky."

Zalinska's face still did not change.

It was steel-like in its rigidity. There was an odd light burning in his blue eyes. He looked Mavsky through and through.

"Hold!" he said in a low penetrating tone, "Do not blacken your soul with more lies. I know you. It is passing strange that we should meet in this manner. So I know all. You have come all this way to Siberia to accomplish by force what you could not by foul schemes. Ah, your day of retribution is at hand, Ivan Mykowsky, for, see, I know you. Ah, it is a kind fate which has thrown us together in this manner and I bow to it. Before we part this time we will settle accounts forever."

Ivan Mykowsky, for the robber chief was no

justice and give a wronged man a chance to avenge his wrongs. Ah, fate has brought this all about, Ivan Mykowsky."

"Don't flatter yourself, dog!" hissed the villain, with a sneer of triumph. "You have incurred a great risk in coming here. A guard of the Czar's is not ten versts distant, and a messenger will quickly bring them. Then back to the mines, back to the slave life. Ha, ha, ha! back to feel the weight of Ivan's vengeance!"

"Never!" cried Zalinska, with power. "Before I go I will square accounts with you."

The crowd had listened to all with but one sentiment.

The high words and accusations, the threats they all regarded as bumcombe. This was an affair of love between jealous rivals.

Such affairs were common in that semi-barbaric region.

He threw off his short jacket and drew a dagger. He bared his firm right arm and said, resolutely:

"If you are not a coward you will meet me, Ivan Mykowsky!"

"I am not a coward, as I will prove to you!" cried Mykowsky, with force.

He drew his own dagger and faced Zalinska. The villain was an adept in the use of the knife, and believed that he could master his hated foe.

Zalinska knew that he was fighting for his honor, for his freedom and for Olga.

There was a deadly resolution uppermost in his breast. He would submit only when death should claim him.

Such resolution, backed by so keen a sentiment of right, was sure to win.

But at this moment the proprietor of the inn appeared. Very affably but firmly he said:

"I cannot permit blood to be shed in this room. Gentlemen, if you will fight, please seek the yard."

"Good enough!" cried Mykowsky, lightly, "let us have the open air. There will be a better chance for you to dodge my knife, varlet!"

"You shall do the dodging," averred Zalinska, determinedly. "I am more than ready."

"So let it be."

The crowd was now wrought up to a high pitch of interest. Affairs of blood will always cater to the Siberians' taste, and now that they saw that the rivals were in earnest, they were deeply interested.

Wagers were even made upon the result, and the crowd stood ready to applaud or deride, as the exigency might demand.

Out into the inn yard they went.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp joined the throng.

The Russians looked at them with idle interest, but did not address them.

The contest quickly began.

Frank felt that he had no right to interfere. Zalinska was his own master and took his chances in the contest.

The young inventor realized that this was the Russian style of doing business, and he had no right to demur.

Of course his sympathies were with Zalinska. "Be jabers, I hope the gossoon will do him up brown," muttered Barney. "If I only had the roight, I'd moighty quick help him to do that same."

"Pooh! don't yo' go gittin' yo' blood up, I'ish," said Pomp, with a grin. "Yo' wouldn't be in it wif dem heavyweights."

"Begorra, I'm in it wid ye, naygur, any time yez may say," retorted Barney.

But before they could badger further, the conflict began.

Zalinska at first stood upon the defensive.

He met the attack of his foe coolly and determinedly. He managed to repel his attack with the greatest of ease.

Like panthers the two combatants faced each other.

They edged about the ring, each looking for an opening. At the slightest move their knives would meet in mid-air, and then they would close.

But so skillful were both in the dagger duel, that for a time neither drew blood.

Then in a swift onslaught Mykowsky managed to bury his dagger in the flesh of Zalinska's forearm.

A shout went up from the crowd.

This seemed to decide the contest. It did not seem possible that with a disabled arm Zalinska could conquer so desperate a fighter as Mykowsky.

The latter's eyes glamed with evil triumph. He already looked upon the victory as his.

A groan escaped the lips of the voyagers as they saw this.

But Zalinska, without a moment's hesitation changed his knife into his left hand.

He seemed as undaunted as ever, and calmly faced his antagonist. Several passes were made, and he appeared to be as skillful with his left arm as his right.

Mykowsky was so confident of victory that he charged upon his antagonist. In doing this he believed that with one fell swoop he could win the fight, and down his adversary.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUEL—TABLES TURNED.

BUT Ivan Mykowsky made the greatest mistake of his life.

Had he fought the battle out as warily as he had begun it there was a likelihood that he might have won.

But Zalinska had been playing deeply and waiting for just the right opportunity.

It came now.

As Mykowsky charged upon him with full force Zalinska affected to retreat. With a savage curse Mykowsky made a lunge forward.

Zalinska parried the attack skillfully, and with an upward movement of his right arm threw Mykowsky's dagger hand up in air.

This exposed the villain. Swift as the lightning flash Zalinska's dagger was driven deep into Mykowsky's side.

So quickly was this done that the villain hardly realized it until he felt the pang as the dagger leaped out of the wound.

He reeled back for an instant faint and overcome.

In that instant the realization was upon him that he was beaten.

It was a terrible sensation, and maddened him beyond all control. With a wolf-like howl and the desperation of a beaten man he rushed again furiously upon Zalinska.

But at that moment a shrill feminine scream went upon the air. Everybody turned to behold a thrilling sight.

Down the steps from the inn came the beautiful figure of Olga Ravetsky.

The young girl had recovered from the drug given her by Mykowsky, and leaving her room had come down to the inn yard just in time to see the close of the deadly duel.

Distraught she rushed forward and directly between the two combatants.

Mykowsky reeled back with a curse. He staggered and seemed about to fall.

But Zalinska caught the form of his love in his arms and strained her to his breast.

"Olga, my own!" he cried, rapturously.

"Victory is mine, and we are united never to be separated again."

Then he turned to Frank Reade, Jr., who was at his shoulder.

"You, kind American, have promised to take us to some foreign land where Russian despots do not hold sway."

"I will pledge myself to do that," replied Frank, warmly. "But is not our position one of danger here?"

"It is. We must leave at once and—"

But Zalinska paused and a ghastly pallor overspread his handsome face. The sound of a bugle was heard, and into the inn yard rolled a coach drawn by eight horses.

Behind the coach as escort rode half a hundred soldiers of the Siberian guard.

Zalinska recognized the pompous, severe-featured officer in uniform who reclined among the cushions.

"God protect us!" he cried, dismally. "Oh! Olga, we are lost. It is the lieutenant of the Plovsky mines, Marowsky. He will know me and I shall go back to servitude!"

"Never!" exclaimed Frank, in an undertone. "Come with me, quick. The air-ship is near at hand."

Imbued with sudden hope, Zalinska seized Olga's arm and turned to flee.

But Mykowsky, half reclining upon the pavings of the inn yard, saw the move and his villainous face was distorted with insane fury.

"What hol!" he shouted. "There is an es-

caped exile! Seize him, guards! It is Zalinska, the Nihilist! I salute you, Marowsky."

The lieutenant of the mines turned his head and saw Zalinska. In an instant six powerful soldiers were upon him.

Poor Zalinska fought desperately, but was overpowered. He was led to the steps of the coach and faced the stern old lieutenant.

"So!" exclaimed that dignitary giving Zalinska a sweeping glance. "You are the fellow who gave my guard such a desperate race. You are Myles Zalinska?"

"I have no desire to evade the fact," replied Zalinska bravely.

"But why did you try to escape? Don't you know that an exile has never yet thwarted the Czar's will?"

"Better death than the awful life in that mine," replied Zalinska proudly. "I am a Russian and I can die."

Marowsky, the stern old lieutenant turned his head a moment as if affected by this reply.

When he turned back, he held an official-looking document in his hands. Mykowsky's face was livid in its revengeful hue.

"That's right! send the dog back to the mines," he hissed. "Give him the bastinado. He sought the life of the Czar."

Marowsky turned upon the wounded wretch almost fiercely and said:

"Who are you?"

"I am Ivan Mykowsky, faithful servant of the Czar."

Marowsky motioned to his soldiers.

"Place that man under arrest," he said.

"What?" gasped Mykowsky. "What do you mean, lieutenant? You arrest me?"

"Yes," replied Marowsky, grimly. "And you will understand all when I read this imperial message from St. Petersburg."

"This is an order of the Czar extending full pardon and restoration of estate to Myles Zalinska, wrongfully convicted of wearing the letter Z and bearing allegiance to the Nihilist society of that name."

"It is true!" howled Mykowsky, "he is guilty."

"He is innocent," thundered Marowsky.

"What is the proof?"

"Here! the dying confession of Peter Ladonsky, the wretch whom you hired to kidnap and brand Zalinska with the Nihilistic sign."

Mykowsky reeled back with a gasp of horror. The game was up.

"Ladonsky has confessed!" he whispered. "Curse him! May he rot for that. Curses on him for his treachery."

All this Zalinska had heard like one in a dream. The lieutenant of the mines now handed him the document.

"This is the imperial pardon," he said. "You are a free and favored subject of the Czar once more. May God be with you!"

A cheer went up from the crowd. Zalinska turned to Olga, who looked up into his face with radiant eyes.

"The clouds have cleared!" she said, sweetly. "This is the reward of fidelity and righteousness."

"And this of love," he said, as he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

Then both turned and thanked Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp for their kindness.

"I shall be restored to my palace in Moscow," said Zalinska, "and you have my cordial invitation to visit us there and stay with us forever if you like."

Frank thanked them warmly, and promised to call if he ever chanced to visit the Russian metropolis.

Then, with Barney and Pomp, he returned to the air-ship.

Dr. Vaneyke listened to the recital with great interest.

"Upon my word!" said the scientist, that is a romance in real life, and a thrilling one, too. I am glad that the tables were turned so neatly on Mykowsky."

How the villain fared thereafter or any of the others, the voyagers never knew. They were a few moments later a thousand feet in the air, and leaving the scene rapidly. It was always presumed, however, that Mykowsky either died or went into exile, and Zalinska and Olga married happily.

The Zephyr continued on to the southward and through Central Asia. The Steppes in all their wildness lay beneath them for days.

Finally they came in sight of a mighty range of mountains.

"The Altai Mountains," said Dr. Vaneyke. "Beyond them we shall enter Outer Mongolia. To the southeast we may hope to enter India."

The words had barely left the learned scientist's lips, when from the desert below a strange, yellow cloud of sand seemed to arise, and struck the Zephyr's keel.

In an instant the air-ship was in the midst of a mighty whirling cloud of sand, all was dark ness, and the air-ship seemed tumbling through space. At that awful moment not one on board believed it possible to escape alive from this terrible storm cloud.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER CENTRAL ASIA.

SWIFT as lightning had been the coming of the sand-storm. It was a phenomena quite common in those parts.

Two conflicting currents of air meet and create a vacuum. Into this the sand is whirled and assumes frightful force.

Very often these "sand spouts" travel the desert for miles only to break upon some object and bury it perhaps a hundred feet deep in sand.

The air-ship, therefore, was in a frightful position.

Only one thing saved it.

At the moment that Dr. Vaneyke had sighted the Altai mountains and declared that Outer Mongolia was beyond them, Frank Reade, Jr., was by his side.

But Barney was in the pilot-house and Pomp in the engine-room. Almost as quick as the yellow cloud arose Barney had seen it.

Quick wit upon the Irishman's part led him to realize the danger. Instantly he passed a lever and sent the current full force into the helices.

While the force of the helices was not sufficient to overcome the power of the storm it yet had its effect.

The air-ship was whirled about like a top, and hurled and buffeted hither and thither as if it was but a bit of light cork upon the ocean waste.

But whenever the slightest lull came the helices gave the Zephyr an upward shoot. It was this influence, slight as it seemed, which undoubtedly saved the air-ship from destruction.

Madder and more furious the storm waxed. Great sheets of flying sand swept across the deck from stem to stern. It was that this material would clog the helices that Frank feared.

In such a case the air-ship would undoubtedly fall to the earth as soon as the storm ceased

to buoy it up. But such a calamity did not occur.

Barney and Pomp, being under cover, were all right, but Frank and Dr. Vaneyke on the air-ship's deck came in for a terrific bit of treatment.

They were buffeted and lashed by the cutting clouds of sand.

Indeed, it was like a knife, and their clothes were half torn from them, while hands and faces were badly lacerated by the keen blast.

Several times Frank reckoned that he must succumb in despair and be hurled into eternity.

But a deadly desperation caused him to hang on pluckily.

The storm could not last forever, however. How the air-ship lived through it the voyagers were never able to fully understand.

But that she did was certain, else the incidents of this story could go no further. Suddenly light broke upon the vision of all, the Zephyr took a series of quick upward leaps and went far up above the storm.

Frank and the doctor crawled from beneath a heap of sand near the rail.

Barney and Pomp appeared on the scene from the cabin.

The air-ship was a sight to behold. Deck and rigging was loaded with fine powdery sand.

The air-ship was now in the bright sunlight and shooting into the upper currents of the atmosphere.

But below there could yet be seen the hailing, tumbling currents of the sandspout as it hurried across the desert.

"Glory fo' goodness!" cried Pomp, wildly. "Did anybody eber see de beat ob dat? Am it not a drefful fing, an' Marse Frank an' Marse Vaneyke jis' look at dem?"

"Begorra, wan wud think that they had been through the Crimean war!" cried Barney.

"I feel as if I had got the roughest shaking up I ever got," declared Dr. Vaneyke, sincerely. "I wouldn't go through it again for anything."

"The same here!" cried Frank, "but we are safe now and going to Heaven too fast. Shut off speed, Barney."

"All right, sor!"

Barney sprang into the pilot-house and reversed the helice lever. The air-ship ceased its upward flight and began slowly to settle down.

Frank and the doctor were obliged to adjourn to the lavatory, take a bath and make a complete change of clothing.

As for Barney and Pomp, they were employed all the rest of the day in cleaning up the Zephyr.

It was no light amount of work to relieve the deck of its load of sand, and also to clear up the delicate running gear of the air-ship.

It required hard work all that day and part of the next. The air-ship was brought to the ground while this was being done, near a liberal spring of water.

The country about was wild and desolate. Wild beasts had roamed the hills; panthers and wolves and vultures of terrific size soared constantly above the air-ship.

By noon the following day, however, the air-ship was ready to go ahead.

Rising a thousand feet, its course was set to the south-east. Frank consulted the chart of Asia, and decided upon a course directly over Outer Mongolia, and thence across to India.

"I think we will find more to interest us this time in India," he declared. "It is but a short while since we took a trip across China."

"I agree with you!" declared Dr. Vaneyke. "Perhaps I will find a little time for archaeological research among the ruins of temples and cities there."

"You shall have the opportunity," said Frank, sincerely.

"Thank you!"

The Zephyr crossed the Altai Mountains.

Certainly it had never been the good fortune of any man before to view this wild region as it was now viewed in its entirety by our voyagers.

It would require volumes to describe the scenery and the sights which were revealed to them. All were prone to admit that the Rocky Mountains of their native land had nothing so wild and picturesque as this central part of Asia.

At times they descended and explored some fastness or hunted for wild game.

But they were careful to avoid falling into any great peril. They were fortunate in this respect, and no incident of thrilling sort occurred until after the mountains were crossed.

Then they came to a section of country which seemed to be inhabited.

There were evidences of human life, but none of the people were visible for some time. That they were nomads and barbarians of the lowest type there was no doubt.

Suddenly Barney, who was in the air-ship's bow, gave a shout.

"Wud yez luk at the Joikes av thim?" he shouted. "I niver seen people loike thim afore in all me loife!"

Dr. Vaneyke was at once by the air-ship's rail.

He was sure to be interested in a matter of this kind.

"Upon my word," he declared, "they are barbarians of a singular type!"

Below upon the plain was a group of nondescript beings.

Less sharp and experienced eyes would have classed them with wild beasts, for they were dressed entirely in skins and were of a brutish, beastly appearance throughout.

They were some half hundred in number, and were regarding the air-ship in a wondering manner, tinged with fear.

"Lower the ship, Barney," said Frank. "Let us take a nearer look at them."

The ship was lowered until within two hundred feet of the earth.

As this was done, the terrified barbarians started away in the wildest of terror. They ran like sheep to the cover of a clump of trees.

But sufficient opportunity was given the doctor to note down their peculiarities and personal features.

"Probably they are as near to the type of the primitive man as we will be likely to find in these days," he declared. "Their homes are probably in caves and dugouts even as were those of prehistoric man."

"Why, then, might not our scientists come here to make a study of prehistoric life?" asked Frank.

"I see no reason why," replied the doctor. "In fact, it would be my first move if I were active in that direction."

The air-ship once more went forward upon her southeastern course.

Suddenly, as the ship sailed over the summit of a mountain, a wonderful sight was spread out to the view of the voyagers.

For the distance of many miles a valley, fertile and rich, extended before their gaze.

In its very center was a large city, with streets and avenues, and mighty buildings of quaint architecture, and all built of a strange, brilliant carmine-hued stone.

The color was not that of brick, but a much

more brilliant hue. Evidently the stone was of a kind peculiar to the region.

But the spectacle was one of most wonderful and glowing sort. None on board the Zephyr had ever seen the like before.

"The most beautiful city in the world!" cried Frank. "The Crimson City! Truly it is a wonderful sight!"

"Right!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, excitedly. "But what sort of people are its inhabitants, I would like to know. They must be civilized."

"Very likely," agreed Frank. "Perhaps they are also a crimson people. This is certainly a wonderful discovery."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CRIMSON CITY.

THE voyagers gazed upon the beautiful spectacle before them with wonder and admiration. Thus far during the trip they had seen nothing to equal it.

They were at the time fully five miles from the Crimson City.

Its bright hue against the emerald green of the valley about it was a contrast most striking.

At first glance it seemed to the aerial voyagers that this was a city teeming with life and traffic, an undiscovered metropolis in an unknown land.

To have the honor of the first discovery, and to first speak with this new found race, was a thing not to be lightly considered.

Dr. Vaneyke, particularly, was much elated.

"This will be the talk of the scientific societies of Europe and America!" he declared. "I shall have my hands full when I get home."

Thus all were congratulating themselves as the air-ship bore down like a huge bird toward the Crimson City.

But in one respect they were doomed to disappointment.

As they neared the city now a great surprise was accorded them.

Its streets were silent and deserted. Many of its magnificent buildings were falling into a state of decay.

The Crimson City was a thing of the past. It had flourished and thriven in early days, and this visit was too late.

Its people had passed away like a dream, as it is known that many mighty nations have done before.

What they were, what their dress, their language, their customs, was all a mystery. Only the ruined buildings furnished evidence that they had ever existed.

The voyagers gazed spell-bound upon the deserted city. A monument of ruins to an obsolete race.

"Upon my word!" said Dr. Vaneyke. "I am very much disappointed! I had hoped that we might have come face to face with the builders of this wonderful city."

"It is to be regretted!" agreed Frank.

"However, may we not descend and take a look about the place?"

"Certainly!"

Barney, who was in the pilot-house now, slackened speed on the helices and the Zephyr began to descend.

Like a mighty eagle the air-ship settled down toward the center of an open square in the heart of the Crimson City.

Here she was allowed to rest upon the pavements and the gang ladder was lowered from the deck.

The appearance of the city from this close standpoint was magnificent.

The avenues were broad and paved with square slabs of crimson stone. There was no evidence that they had been used for wheeled vehicles.

Camels and asses were undoubtedly the vehicles of conveyance used, and the public square in the days of the city's prosperity must have furnished a wonderful panorama of Oriental magnificence.

It was easy for the imagination to supply the features lacking. Dr. Vaneyke was all enthusiasm.

"I tell you, the people who inhabited this place were not of the ordinary kind," he declared, "they were certainly architects and artisans of the highest order. Here was a degree of civilization fully equal to the Greeks."

"This undoubtedly was a powerful city in the days of Athens," declared Frank.

"Without doubt. But what a strange problem for this generation. These people lived, flourished and prospered here some few centuries ago. Now not one of them is to be found. What has become of them?"

"Indeed, that is a serious question," admitted Frank.

"They have left their city behind them. How do you explain their disappearance?"

"It is not easily explained. You might say that a conquering army came in here and exterminated them."

"But would they not also have leveled the city?"

"Such was the ancient custom."

"Exactly."

"On the other hand, a pestilence may have swept them out of existence. The survivors may have sought asylum in other lands, have become scattered, and never returning, the city has since remained deserted."

"There is nothing unreasonable in that argument," agreed Dr. Vaneyke, "but is it not a serious question to consider? Look at home. There are our vast cities of New York and Brooklyn, Philadelphia and Chicago. Does it seem possible to us that some centuries from now they may be a heap of ruins, to be explored by savants from a distant clime, even as we are exploring this city?"

Frank shook his head.

"It seems incredible," he agreed, "but it is by no means impossible."

"Certainly not."

An exploration of the Crimson City was now in order of course.

Pomp volunteered to remain aboard the air-ship. The explorers took repeating rifles with them, for it was not known just what perils they might encounter.

Before them was a mighty temple, with steps of a kind of stone resembling onyx. It was decided to enter and explore this first.

Dr. Vaneyke led the way into the temple. The aged scientist examined the stone critically and chipped off a piece with his geologist's hammer.

Frank and Barney followed him into the temple.

Passing through a portico built something after the Roman pattern, they came into a spacious hall or council chamber.

Here was evidence in plenty of the former magnificence of the building.

The pillars supporting the roof or ceiling of this massive chamber were of a beautiful stone highly polished and resembling agate.

They were of various colors, so arranged as to give a blending worthy of our modern artists.

Through this chamber our explorers passed,

commenting upon the beauty of the vari-colored stone.

Everywhere the doctor secured a specimen. He was in high spirits, and kept up a constant stream of talk.

But Barney was not the kind to feel deeply interested in such matters.

His was more of a prosaic mind, and moreover, his education did not extend to the scope of scientific research.

He listened patiently to what Dr. Vaneyke said with regard to the temple and the one-time inhabitants of the city, shaking his head and muttering:

"Be jabbers, mebbe that's thrue. But av it is, how does the docthor know anything more about it than I do?"

So at a convenient opportunity Barney left Frank and the doctor and strolled away to another part of the temple.

The Celt had reached the entrance to a small courtyard, when an exclamation escaped his lips.

"Be jabbers, that's very quare."

An object lying upon a marble bench was what had caused the remark. It was what looked like a piece of red flannel, but upon picking it up Barney saw that it was nothing more than a jacket similar to those worn by American peasants.

The Celt was too astonished for a moment to act.

He held the coat up at arm's length. He knew that it belonged to none of his party.

"Whurroo," he exclaimed in amazement.

"Av it ain't a bit av a coat an' phwere is the owner? Shure it can't have been here since the people lift the city, I'll take me 'davy."

Barney now had recovered his senses sufficiently to make a further investigation. He passed into the courtyard cautiously.

"Av there's any of thim barbarians hereabouts now," he muttered, "I'd betther see thim fust afore they see me. Mebbe they won't like the looks av an Irishman."

So the Celt began to make a careful search of the vicinity.

This proved the wisest move he had ever made in his life.

He crossed the courtyard and came to a corridor leading into another part of the temple. Just as he reached that point, he heard a loud cry for help, there was the crash of fire-arms and the clang of steel.

Barney saw several red-clad forms hustling through a distant chamber in the temple.

At once the Irishman's curiosity and fear were aroused.

"Shure, it's Misther Frank an' the docthor they have attacked!" he cried. "Bad cess to the hoodlums!"

Away Barney dashed to the relief of his friends. But just as he was passing into the other part of the temple a tall, swarthy faced barbarian sprang from behind a pillar and whirled a steel scimeter over his head.

Barney O'Shea was a man of quick wit and rare adroitness.

He saw that the fellow would split him in two if he hesitated. Therefore, he dashed forward and grappled with him.

The fellow was a perfect giant, but that did not deter Barney.

The celt knocked the scimeter from his grasp at the first blow. The barbarian seemed astonished, but with a hoarse yell he closed with Barney.

Then followed a struggle the like of which is seldom recorded.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DR. VANEYKE BECOMES A PRISONER.

BARNEY speedily found that he had hold of a giant in strength, but a child in skill and science.

The Irishman was a famous wrestler, and this ability now fully made up for the other's prodigious muscle.

Yet it was a terrific struggle which followed. Being brought to close quarters without warning, Barney had found no opportunity to use firearms.

So the barbarian escaped being shot. But as bad a fate was in store for him.

Round and round the two contestants whirled, now one having the vantage, now the other.

The barbarian's companions had left him and did not know of his position. He could therefore expect no assistance from them.

Barney tried to get a shoulder lock upon his antagonist and throw him.

But the other was so powerful and wary that he could not do it.

"Tare an' 'ounds," gritted the Celt, with sudden desperation. "Yez won't kape me here much longer. There's Misther Frank as wants me help an' shure I musht go to him."

So saying, Barney made a prodigious effort and fairly lifted the other from his feet. There was a swaying, a quick spring and a trip and Barney had thrown his man.

As he fell with the force of a stone from a catapult, the barbarian's head struck one of the stone pillars.

He never moved after that, but lay limply back upon the pavement. Barney was astonished, for he did not fancy the blow severe enough to produce insensibility.

But a quick examination told the Celt the startling truth.

The fellow had struck the pillar in such a way as to break his neck. He was dead before he struck the floor.

"Bejabers, there's nothin' more to be feared from him thin," muttered Barney. "Ah, well now I must be off to give Misther Frank help."

The Hibernian sprang away quickly. He darted through the arches of the temple, and to his amazement came face to face with Frank Reade.

Frank was flying before a large and enraged mob of the barbarians.

"Misther Frank!" cried Barney, excitedly. "Phwerveiver is the docthor?"

"My God! he is a prisoner in the hands of those wretches," replied Frank, in a distracted voice. "I fear he is lost forever for they will kill him."

"Och hone, that's too bad!" wailed the sympathetic Barney. "Shure, Misther Frank, we must rescue him."

"Certainly, but there are too many of them against us now. Quick, for your life! We must go back to the air-ship."

Barney raised his rifle and fired at the pursuing foe. One of them fell, but this did not deter the others.

They came on, a howling infuriated mob. They did not seem to know the use of fire-arms but were armed with javelins and scimeters.

Dr. Vaneyke and Frank had been taken unaware by the wretches.

As a result the doctor fell into their clutches. Frank made a valiant effort to rescue him, but in vain.

Meanwhile, Pomp on board the Zephyr had witnessed a part of the struggle.

He saw Dr. Vaneyke hustled out of the temple by the barbarians and placed upon the back of a fleet horse.

To this he was strapped, and a number of the other barbarians, mounted upon other horses, dashed away with the prisoner down a side avenue.

The doctor was pale, but calm. He knew that he was in a bad plight, but nothing was to be gained by showing fear.

His captors he recognized at once as a species of Mongolian hill robbers, whose business was to plunder travelers and steal them away for ransom to the fastnesses of the hills.

He knew that the least resistance upon his part would be futile, and would mean death.

So he kept cool and calm, and reposed faith in the ability of his friends to rescue him.

Pomp was itching to go in pursuit of the Mongolians with the air-ship, but he knew that this would be impolitic.

Frank and Barney were yet in the temple, and would be left to the mercy of the barbarians.

But at this moment Frank and Barney dashed out of the temple, and toward the air-ship.

Pomp saw the barbarians chasing them full tilt.

The ducky was all excitement, and rushing to the rail, waved his arms, shouting wildly:

"Hurry up, Marse Frank! Hurry up, I ish. You'se dead suah to git here fust."

This looked like a fact. To expedite matters, however, Pomp raised his Winchester and began to blaze away at the barbarians.

Three of them fell, but this did not deter the others.

On they came furiously.

"Golly!" muttered Pomp, with starting eyeballs. "I'se jes' 'fraid dey come right abo'd de air-ship."

Indeed, so it seemed that they would. But Frank now leaped over the rail.

Barney came close behind him.

But the barbarians were also near at hand, and began also to pile upon the deck.

They seemed literally to have no fear whatever.

All three of the voyagers blazed away at them with their Winchesters.

But this did not check them. They reached the deck, and seemed very likely to gain possession of the Zephyr.

Frank did not intend that they should, though.

He saw, however, that quick action was necessary, and he delayed not further.

"To the cabin, boys!" he cried. "I am going to charge the hull with electricity."

Both Barney and Pomp knew just what to do.

They rushed into the cabin and got upon a platform with glass legs. Frank darted into the pilot-house.

He was not a moment too soon.

A number of the barbarians threw themselves against the door. Quick as a flash, Frank touched a particular lever.

In a moment sparks leaped from the wire, and then a most astounding, as well as amusing, scene followed.

There were fully a score of the Mongolian robbers on the deck.

The moment the electric fluid passed into the steel hull and deck of the Zephyr, they felt it.

Of course, they did not know what it was, and terror seized them with the first astonishing thrill.

But as the volts came in greater force, several made a rush for the rail to leap over.

Before they reached it, though, they were seized and flung in various directions by the invisible but giant element. They were flung into the air only to fall back on the deck and be again flung up.

These who reached the rail were thrown over with such force that they were badly maimed, or suffered from a broken neck. It was a terrible experience for them.

Frank kept the current on until he saw that the deck was cleared. Then he turned Lever No. 11, the helice lever.

Up into into the air rose the Zephyr, leaving the startled and terrified robbers below.

They did not stand their ground, however, but broke and fled in the direst of confusion. To them it was a most supernatural proceeding.

The air-ship shot up into the air five hundred feet. Here, Frank held it in suspension.

Barney and Pomp came rushing out of the cabin. Pomp related the fate of Dr. Vaneyke, and Frank cried:

"We must overtake them and rescue the doctor at any cost. Take the wheel, Barney. Now for action!"

Dr. Vaneyke was dearly beloved by all, and it was not proposed to leave him in the hands of the barbarians.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE VOLCANO.

POMP remembered the direction taken by the robbers in leaving the Crimson City with Dr. Vaneyke as their prisoner.

It was to the west, and as the air-ship now sailed over the city in that direction, a fleeing body of horsemen were seen making their way at full speed into the hills.

That Dr. Vaneyke was in their midst there was no doubt.

Accordingly, the air-ship was sent forward at full speed to overtake them. Of course the Zephyr could outspeed the horses, but the distance to overcome was great.

Frank went to the bow of the ship and directed Barney, who was in the pilot-house.

On swept the Zephyr like a monster bird. Every moment they gained upon the robbers.

Now the hills were reached and the captors of Dr. Vaneyke were seen to look upward with terror, and lashed their horses again to the utmost.

The scientist was now plainly seen in their midst securely bound to a horse's back. Nearer every moment swept the Zephyr.

But the Mongolian robbers just at the last moment adopted a method of escape which surprised the aerial voyagers.

Suddenly a broad-mouthed cavern was seen to yawn wide before them. Into this they galloped and disappeared from sight almost instantly.

The Zephyr was brought to a stop and by Frank's orders it descended to a point just above the cavern's mouth.

What was to be done?

An expression of blank dismay was upon Frank's face. To enter the cavern with the Zephyr was of course impossible.

Further pursuit of the robbers seemed quite impossible. To venture into the cavern in such small force would be almost equivalent to suicide.

Time was precious. Every moment increased the peril of Dr. Vaneyke.

Frank was almost beside himself with desperation and despair.

"Heaven help him," he muttered. "I don't see how we are going to save him."

"Golly, Marse Frank," cried Pomp, in dismay. "I jes' finks it am all up wif Marse Vaneyke dis yer time."

"Bejabers, it luks that way," said Barney, with emotion.

The aged scientist was dearly beloved by the

two faithful servitors, who were indebted to him for many kind favors.

"But he must be saved!" cried Frank desperately. "Can't one of you think of a plan?"

Barney suddenly clapped his hands.

"Be jabbers, I have it!" he cried.

"Well?" cried Frank eagerly.

"Shure, why can't we shmoke the devils out av there jist the same as ye would a wood-chuck out av his hole?"

Pomp burst into derisive laughter, and Frank looked disappointed.

"Well, phwat are yez larfin' at, naygur?" spluttered Barney.

"Golly sake, I'ish!" cried the darky. "What yo' fink become ob Marse Vaneyke all dat time? Don' yo' fink he be sufingcated too?"

Barney looked crestfallen, and relapsed into humiliated silence.

But Frank rejoined:

"Well, think of something else if you can. Of course Barney's plan is a little bit obscure, but you may hit something else."

Frank went to the ship's rail and looked over.

He saw that the ground was well trodden, as if the robbers were in the habit of seeking refuge in this cavern constantly.

It was no doubt their stronghold. For a time the young inventor was wholly at a loss how to proceed to rescue Dr. Vaneyke.

But suddenly a strange and most opportune thing happened.

The mountain suddenly seemed to give a peculiar tremble and a dull thunderous roar.

Then looking up to the summit with startled gaze the aerial voyagers saw a quantity of flame and smoke shooting up into the air.

This was from the old and long extinct crater. It had suddenly burst forth into activity again.

It was somewhat odd that the eruption should have occurred at such an opportune moment for our friends.

But occur it did, and a great shower of ashes began to fill the air and sifted down upon the air-ship's deck.

Streams of lava began to flow down the mountain side, and the thunder of the eruption increased.

It began to look dangerous for the air-ship, but Frank took a great risk and remained.

Suddenly, just what he expected, and was longing for happened.

The eruption had acted in a terrifying manner upon the robbers in the cave. No doubt they fancied that they were in danger of being buried alive in the place.

So they made a mad break for the entrance. As they came rushing into the outer air Frank looked for the doctor among them.

But the scientist did not appear.

The appalling truth was forced upon the famous inventor. The scientist had been left in the cavern to perish.

Frank paid no heed to the robbers. He allowed them to escape safely down the mountain-side.

He was thinking of Dr. Vaneyke, and satisfied that the scientist had really been left in the place to perish, he called out sharply to Barney:

"Lower the ship, Barney! I am going into the cave after the doctor."

"Oh, Misther Frank!" cried the Celt. "Would yez think av the danger."

"I have no time to think of that," replied Frank.

"But yez must not go. Shure, let me go in yure place."

"No," replied Frank, shortly.

"Thin shure I'll go wid yez," protested Barney.

"Do as I say," thundered Frank. "Stay by the air ship and when we come out, if we ever do, you can be ready to help us then."

The air-ship touched the ground and the famous inventor leaped out.

He had provided himself with a hatchet and some rope, for he knew not but that he might need them.

Also he carried his rifle. Into the cave he quickly went.

As he entered, he saw a thin stream of lava trickling across the floor. A groan of horror escaped his lips.

For he realized that the cave must be connected with the crater of the volcano. In that case for aught he knew, the doctor might have been overcome by the hot lava or fumes long ere this.

But he rushed into the cavern, taking care to avoid the stream of lava.

For full fifty yards the famous inventor kept on. Then he came to a serious obstacle.

This was in the shape of a counter-passage, which crossed the main cavern, and here flowed a stream of lava full ten feet wide.

Frank dared not risk a leap.

Ordinarily he could leap a wider gulf, but he knew that the slightest misstep would mean death, not only to himself, but to the man for whom he was looking.

So he paused a moment to consider some plan for crossing the molten torrent.

He felt sure that the doctor was beyond it, and that he was still alive. In fact, he raised his voice:

"Halloa! Dr. Vaneyke!"

A second later an answer came faintly back:

"Ay, ay!"

"I am Frank Reade, and I am coming to your rescue. Are you safe?"

"I am tied hand and foot. If you come quickly you can save me."

"Keep up courage. I will come."

Frank was now very determined in a purpose to rescue his friend.

He saw a projecting spur of rock in the roof of the cavern. At once he made a slip noose in the rope and flung it upward skillfully.

It caught the projection and tightened about it. Testing its strength Frank felt sure that it would support him.

Then he gathered himself for the spring and swung himself out into the air.

Across the molten stream he shot and landed safely on the other side. He recovered himself and tied the rope up so that it would not be consumed by the lava.

Then he was thrilled by hearing Dr. Vaneyke's voice faintly calling:

"Hurry, Frank, or I shall die."

"Hang on!" cried the famous inventor resolutely. "Don't give up!"

Frank rushed on through the cavern with all speed. He knew the mighty importance of haste.

But it seemed an interminable distance. He kept on, however, at full speed.

Just as he reached a point near where he believed he must find Dr. Vaneyke he came to an appalling spectacle.

Before him was a perfect sea of molten lava so wide that he could not hope to cross.

"My God!" he cried, "where are you, doctor?"

But no answer came back to his agonized appeal.

All was the silence of the grave.

CHAPTER XX.

OVER INDIA.

In that moment Frank Reade, Jr., believed the worst. He had no doubt whatever that the scientist was dead.

Weak and faint with horror, he sank down for a moment overcome.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned. "Poor Vaneyke! Only to think that I cannot save him!"

But hope once more revived in the plucky youth's breast.

He would not give him up.

"Not until I have found him will I believe it," he muttered. "He may have merely fainted."

This was certainly logical. Frank at once began to study a method of crossing the wide stream of lava.

He had no rope now, and if he had it would be hardly likely to do him any service.

The lava current was much too wide to be crossed in such a manner.

But at that moment Frank saw what he believed was a safe and sure way of crossing.

High upon the cavern wall there were projecting ledges or shelves of rocks. It was but a moment's work for him to swing himself up to them.

To his joy he found that by clinging to the wall he could make his way along slowly but surely.

In this manner he actually succeeded in crossing the deposit of lava. Once upon the other side he staggered on through the cavern.

To his surprise he suddenly saw a familiar form before him.

It was Dr. Vaneyke.

The scientist was lying upon the cavern floor, and his hands and feet were securely bound with thongs.

It required but a glance for Frank to see that he was unconscious. The pain of his bonds which cut deep into the flesh had induced this.

In a moment Frank was by his side.

"Vaneyke!" he cried. "Speak to me. You are not dead, old friend."

But the still beating pulse satisfied Frank that he was yet alive. At once Frank cut the thongs and then drew a flask of whisky from his pocket.

A few drops of this between the doctor's lips brought him to quickly.

He opened his eyes slowly, and seeing Frank bending over him, exclaimed:

"Thank God! I am saved!"

"I hope so, old friend!" cried Frank, earnestly. "Do you feel better now?"

"I am all right," said the scientist. "I was only a trifle faint, that was all."

In a few moments Dr. Vaneyke recovered fully and got upon his feet.

Satisfied that he was himself again, Frank thought of immediate action. He knew that this was imperatively necessary.

The thunder of the eruption was now something awful, and the flow of lava was rapidly increasing.

It was necessary to get out of the cave as quickly as possible.

"Come!" Frank cried, earnestly. "We must not stay here longer, doctor."

"Where shall we go?"

"We must return to the air-ship."

"But how?"

"Why, by the same way that I came in here."

"Can we do it?"

"That is not the question. We must do it," said Frank, desperately.

They at once started through the cavern.

Frank led the way, fairly dragging the doctor after him.

But in a few moments they came to an impassable barrier.

With horror Frank saw that the flow of lava had so rapidly increased that it was flatly impossible for him to reach the shelf by which he had entered.

What was to be done?

The situation was really getting desperate. The force of the eruption was increasing, and the walls of the cavern shook and seemed likely to fall in.

"My God!" cried Frank, in an agony of desperation. "We must get out of here in some way."

"But we certainly cannot go in this direction," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"No."

"Wait a moment."

"What is it?"

The doctor passed a hand across his brow thoughtfully.

"If I remember aright," he said, "not all of the Mongolians went out that way. Some went further into the cave. They did not return, and it seems to me there must be another exit in that direction."

Frank's decision was quickly made.

"We can no more than risk it," he declared.

"It is death to remain here."

Accordingly, back through the cavern they ran. They presently came to a passage diverging to the right and trending upward.

Frank felt a draught of cold air through this.

"I believe this is the exit!" he cried, joyfully.

He bent downward and examined the soil of the cavern floor. There were plainly discernible footprints in it.

"This is the way they went!" he cried. "Come along, doctor."

Up through the passage they went. In a few moments what seemed like a wall of smoke was before them.

Then they came out into the air. They were upon a shelf of rock which plainly overlooked a part of the crater.

The active part of it fortunately was some distance away, but the crater was seething and boiling, and giving forth tremendous reports.

It was likely to at any moment give way to an eruption.

Our adventurers, therefore decided that they had better get out of the way as quickly as possible.

Accordingly they made their way hastily along a shelf of rock, and came out upon the brow of the mountain.

A clear course lay before them, and they began to descend with all speed.

The air-ship was seen hovering near, and by good luck Pomp and Barney saw them.

They at once brought the Zephyr down to the spot, and in a few moments they were once more safe and sound aboard the air-ship.

The happy congratulations were many, but Frank did not like the appearance of the thundering volcano so near them, so he gave the Zephyr full speed to the southward.

As the air-ship sped on through the bracing air, the volcano and the Crimson City were soon left far behind.

It had been a narrow escape for both Frank and the doctor, and none in the party cared for a repetition of such an experience.

The air-ship did not venture to descend again for several days.

Still to the southwest, the Zephyr kept all the while nearing the boundary line of India.

A wild and savage country was passed over in this flight.

Dr. Vaneyke satisfied himself with taking observations through a glass from the air-ship's deck.

He had no desire to risk falling into the hands of a hostile people again. One experience was quite enough.

One morning the last range of the mountains of Thibet were passed over, and the mighty, snow-clad summits of the Himalayas burst into view.

Mt. Everest was visible far to the eastward. From their aerial position the voyagers had an unparalleled view of this most wonderful region.

The Himalayas passed, the sun began to assume the fiercest of heat.

It would have been unbearable on the air-ship's deck but that Frank had awnings put up.

Taking the bearings one day, Frank learned that the part of India they were now over was the Nepal State.

This was a part of the wildest region in India, and replete with perils of the most terrible sort.

There were terrible jungles and dense woods, infested with wild beasts and venomous reptiles.

In places native settlements were seen, and at one point where there was an English garrison, the air-ship was given a royal salute.

Frank replied by discharging a couple of electric bombs in mid-air.

Soon after leaving this spot the first of a series of thrilling adventures began.

Barney chanced to be in the bow of the air-ship, and they were just over a wild patch of tangled forest when a thrilling cry escaped his lips.

In a moment Frank Reade, Jr., was by his side.

A startling scene was spread to their gaze below.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE POWER OF THUGS.

In the heart of the dense wood there was a small clearing.

In the center of this there was a native hut or rather a species of bungalow around which there had been driven a palisade of bamboo stakes.

Behind this palisade three men of apparently English nationality were holding at bay at least half a hundred fierce Indian warriors.

They were savage fellows, dressed in the half-Turkish costume affected by the natives of Nepal, so near to Turkestan, anyway.

Armed with spears, darts, and dressed in native armor of plaited grass, they were fiercely trying to carry the bungalow.

The three defenders were armed with rifles, and they had defended themselves valiantly to the bitter cost of the natives.

Certainly half a dozen of them lay dead upon the ground.

Two white men stretched out upon the grass behind the palisades showed the defenders had originally numbered five.

The battle was raging fiercely when the air-ship appeared above the scene.

The appearance of the air-ship had a curious effect.

The defenders of the bungalow looked amazed, and paused in their fighting to gaze at it.

But the ignorant natives, not comprehending its character, at once accepted it as an evil

omen—an apparition of the supernatural sort—and fled in abject terror.

The woods quickly concealed them, and the battle was over.

Frank, however, threw down an electric bomb into the woods to make sure of the victory.

It exploded with terrific force.

Then the air-ship settled down until it was within a hundred feet of the ground.

Frank leaned over the rail and hailed the men below.

They were evidently Englishmen, and wore white suits, cork hats, and carried repeating rifles.

"Hello!" shouted Frank. "Do you want any help?"

"It seems you have helped us without the asking," replied one of the men. "Who are you, and what kind of an invention have you got there?"

"This is the air-ship Zephyr!"

"An air-ship!" gasped the Englishman, "then the old prophecy has come to pass of men riding in air."

"It looks like it," replied Frank. "What is your nationality?"

"We are English and good subjects of the queen. What are you?"

"We are Americans."

"Well, I might have known that it was some Yankee invention. But won't you come down and see us?"

"With pleasure!"

Frank made a motion to Barney and the air-ship settled down. Very quickly it rested upon the ground.

Then the three Englishmen came out from behind the palisade.

Frank descended the gang-ladder and advanced to meet them. Dr. Vaneyke followed while Barney and Pomp stood at the rail.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., from the United States," said Frank, plainly.

"And I am Archibald St. Clair of Sussex, England," replied the first Englishman, "this is Lord Hugh Swelton and Mr. Richard Montgomery, Lieutenant of Her Majesty's Hussars."

Frank shook hands with the nobility and then introduced Dr. Vaneyke and Barney and Pomp.

"So you're really on a trip around the world!" cried Sir Archibald. "Well, what blooming sport it must be. It will be a great fad now to have an air-ship instead of a fast yacht."

"I am not so sure of that," said Frank, with twinkling eyes. "It will be necessary first to build one."

"Aw, then you have your ship patented?"

"No, but the secret is mine, and that I am not giving away."

"Catch a Yankee giving any secrets away," laughed Sir Archibald. "But deuce take it, I'm awful glad to meet you if you are Yankees don't you know. We were having a blue time when you came up."

"I am glad if I have been of service," said Frank.

"Service! Why, you've saved our lives. Those chaps are the followers of El Kado the Thug. They would have downed us very shortly. Two of our boys are gone, poor fellows. We owe you our lives, Mr. Reade."

"Thugs, eh?" exclaimed Frank. "But what are you doing in this desolate region? It seems to me that you are reckless to come here at all."

"Come in and partake of a glass of wine and we will tell you all."

Frank could not refuse, and he followed the Englishmen to the piazza of the bungalow.

While the other two Englishmen were tenderly removing the bodies of their dead comrades, Sir Archibald told the story.

Seated at a willow table, with a decanter of wine between them, Frank listened to a tale so weird and horrible that it thrilled him through and through.

"Twelve months ago, in Calcutta," said Sir Archibald, "the gentlemen to whom I just introduced you were society leaders there, and enjoying life as only Englishmen know how."

"Lord Swelton, as you will see, is much older than either of us, and at that time was Lieut. Dick Montgomery's prospective father-in-law."

"Beatrice Swelton was the belle of Calcutta, and many a young officer laid his heart at her feet."

"But she met with Dick Montgomery, loved him, and was betrothed to him with Lord Swelton's consent."

"Swelton thought the world of his daughter. Indeed, she was the apple of his eye. But he had faith in Montgomery and so countenanced the match."

"Thus matters were, and everybody in Calcutta envied Dick when a terrible thing occurred."

"Swelton had in his employ a native servant, a native of the State of Nepal."

"He had been warned several times that Nigra was a treacherous fellow and leagued with the Thugs. His lordship would not believe it until one day he actually caught him in the act of stealing."

"Swelton was so angry that he caused the fellow to be taken up by the authorities and publicly flogged."

"Nigra was a revengeful fellow, and soon Swelton received a mysterious message of warning that his life was threatened by the Thugs."

"Of course, like any brave man, Swelton did not heed it. Then one day the awful blow fell."

"The house was entered. Beatrice was drugged and taken away. From that day to this Swelton has not seen his daughter."

"The affair created a tremendous sensation. Of course, sympathy was strong for Swelton. Myself and four others of the Hussars, with the father and lover, started out on the trail."

"We have been a year in the quest, and here we are in Nepal. We have had terrible experiences, I can assure you."

"One of our number was killed by a thug, two have just been shot, and another died of fever."

"We three are all that is left of the party. But we mean to follow Nigra to the end, and rescue Beatrice or die in the attempt."

Sir Archibald finished speaking, and poured out a glass of wine. Frank was deeply impressed with the thrilling narrative.

At once his sympathies were enlisted, and he was about to offer his services to the Englishman in the quest when a thrilling thing happened.

A warning cry came from Barney and Pomp on the air-ship's deck. Then into the clearing rushed a legion of the natives who had overcome their superstitious fear, and had returned to the attack.

CHAPTER XXII.

DEFEATING THE THUGS.

It was a thrilling incident, the appearance of the natives upon the scene again just as Frank was about to offer the services of his air-ship in the quest of Beatrice Swelton.

He and Sir Archibald were instantly upon their feet.

Dick Montgomery and Lord Swelton came rushing behind the palisade. Dr. Vaneyke quickly clambered aboard the Zephyr.

The natives had rushed for the air-ship. Barney and Pomp were hesitating, not wishing to leave their master behind.

Frank seeing the danger shouted: "Go up, Barney, then give them the bombs. Be lively!"

Barney needed no second bidding.

The natives were almost at the air-ship's rail. But the Celt pulled Lever No. 11 and the Zephyr shot upward.

The natives halted a moment and gazed at the air-ship with something of their former superstitious fear.

But they had overcome this to a great extent and were all eager for the fray once more.

Frank alone of the Zephyr's crew was left on the level. The air-ship now was fully five hundred feet above the earth.

The natives pressed forward now with savage fury.

They were a picturesque crew as they came on to the attack. Their complexion of that peculiar nut-brown, their raven black hair and piercing eyes, their strange dress and fantastic appearance, formed a scene which once seen was not easily forgotten.

In fact, their savage looks were enough to frighten a brave man, and Frank Reade, Jr., even felt peculiar as they came for the palisade like a band of bloodthirsty wolves.

"Stand firm all!" cried Sir Archibald, who was all pluck and resolution. "We can and must whip them."

"Right!" cried Frank, "and if they only do their duty aboard the air-ship we will surely do it."

But for some reason or other relief did not come from the air-ship as soon as expected by Frank.

The truth was, Barney at the rail with the electric bombs, was fearful of dropping them at that height for fear of blowing up some of his friends as well.

"Sure, naygur, yez will have to go down a bit," cried Barney, excitedly. "I don't darst to fire it down onto the spalpeens for fear av me own people."

"A'right, fish!" cried Pomp, slacking the speed of the helices, "Jes, yo' sing out when yo' fink I has gone down far enuff."

"All right, naygur. Now be aisy!" cried Barney, steadily.

Down settled the air-ship.

Dr. Vaneyke was also by the rail with a bomb in his hand. Between them they had enough of electric death to literally exterminate the whole gang of thugs.

Suddenly Barney cried:

"A'right, naygur! Jest yez wait a bit an' I'll parlyze the omadhouns."

The air-ship now hung motionless not two hundred feet over the heads of the villainous crew.

But they seemed to utterly disregard the air-ship, and were concentrating all their energies to the destruction of the palisade.

They rushed upon the frail defense, and in spite of the red hot fire from the defenders they soon succeeded in tearing a part of it down.

Then through this breach they rushed madly. Woe to the brave defenders if that merciless crew meets them in the open.

Weight of numbers would be sure to tell the

story. But it was not destined that they should come to a close combat.

Suddenly Barney raised one of the bombs with a loud shout:

"Bad luck to the divils! It's a sorry day for thim that they iver attacked Frank Reade an' the air-ship."

"Golly, dat am a fac'l" cried Pomp. "Jes' gib'em a good dose, Barney."

The Celt needed no urging. The bomb left his hand. Down it went with unerring aim.

It struck fairly in the midst of the gang. The effect was simply terrific and far beyond human conception.

With a tremendous roar, a hole large enough to sink the bungalow in, was made in the ground.

Into this full a score of the villains were piled in an indiscriminate heap. Death was almost instantaneous with these.

Others on the outside of the fated circle were blown from their feet and hurled in various directions. Those unhurt and able to do so, beat a terrified retreat.

In less than thirty seconds not a live thug was on the spot.

Into the woods they had rushed, wholly overwhelmed with terror at the result of the ill advised attack on the air-ship's crew. Dr. Vaneyke did not throw his bomb. There was no need of it. The victory was won.

The thugs were effectually dispersed and they did not show up again that day.

The thick foliage of the almost impenetrable forest hid them from view.

The Englishmen had witnessed the exhibition of the air-ship's power from the bungalow. They were deeply impressed.

"Egad!" cried Dick Montgomery, "that is the most complete victory I ever witnessed. Why the blooming jays couldn't stand before that kind of fire not a moment."

"You're right, lad!" agreed Lord Swelton. "It was a right corky thing."

"Mr. Reade, again we owe you our lives," declared Sir Archibald.

"Not a bit of it," cried Frank in his whole hearted way. "You owe me nothing. If I have been able to do you a brief service, it makes me happy as well as you."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Lord Swelton, elevating his monocle. "You Americans fairly equal the French in compliment and gallantry."

"Upon my word," declared Sir Archie with conviction, "I believe that if there is ever a railroad built to the moon it will be a Yankee who will project it."

"That is the fairest thing I ever heard England say of America," laughed Frank. "Certainly there should be nothing but brotherly love and friendship between the land of liberty and the mother country."

"It is what should exist!" declared Lord Swelton with emphasis, "I say, bury the old feud with the bones of our ancestors who are responsible for it, not us."

"Hurrah!" cried Dick Montgomery. "England and America forever!"

Everybody was in the best of spirits now.

There was little danger of another attack from the thugs right away.

Barney was leaning over the Zephyr's rail and heard the flattering remarks given above.

He scowled, and of course had to put in his oar.

"Begorra, that's all right!" he cried, "but Hingland never'll prosper until she sets ould Ireland free!"

Everybody laughed at Barney's attitude.

"That will come some day, Barney," cried Sir Archie, with a smile. "Home rule will bring it around all right."

"To the divil wid yer home rule, or any other rule!" cried Barney, heatedly. "That's only a bit av a lame argyment got up to throw sand in the poor Micks' eyes while the English landlords go an grinding the lives out av our poor people. Don't yez talk to me. Barney O'Shea knows what's what, an' don't yez fergit to pin that in yez hat."

"Huh! dat's nice talk fo' yo', I'ish," put in Pomp, in a bantering tone. "You'se allus

The dry humor of the two rascals had amused the Englishmen much and they seemed much revived in spirits. Even Lord Swelton appeared to emerge from the terrible gloom which had been upon him since the abduction of his beloved daughter Beatrice.

Frank had become deeply interested in the affair, and he saw another opportunity to right a great wrong, and he at once modestly offered the services of his air-ship.

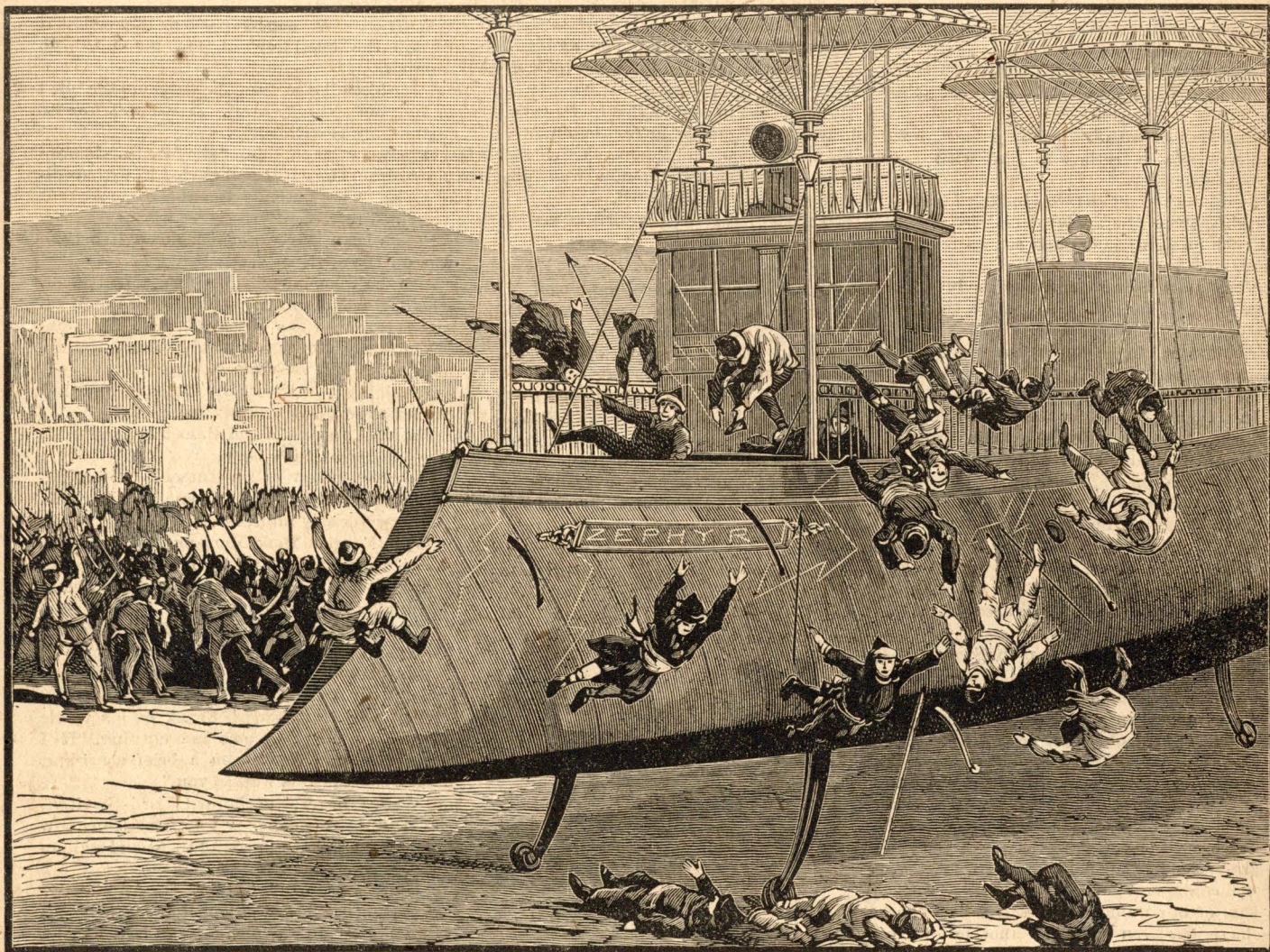
Of course the Englishmen accepted with great delight and expressed their gratitude in the warmest terms.

where, and had imbedded itself above the barb in the victim's side.

Lord Swelton had been prostrated with the shock and pain. In an instant Frank was by his side and before the others had recovered from their horror.

"Great Heavens!" cried the young inventor. "Are you badly hurt, sir?"

"I rather think not," replied the nobleman appearing to recover himself. "it came with such a sudden twinge of pain that for a moment I had to give way to it."



These who reached the rail were thrown over with such force that they were badly maimed, or suffered from a broken neck. It was a terrible experience for them. Frank kept the current on until he saw that the deck was cleared.

tellin' about what a po' mis'able people de niggers am, but I jes' reckon dey's free people, anyway, sence de 'mansipation procklingashun of Abraham Linkum."

"Bejabers, if yez mean to cast any aspersion on der Irish people, naygur, yez had betther think twict afore yez do it."

"Huh! yo' don' skeer me one bit, I'ish," sniffed Pomp.

"Whurroo! I'll scare ye wid me fisht in yer eye if yez don't take care," warned Barney, in a blustering manner.

There would certainly have been trouble between the two had it not been for Frank, who, with a few sharp words, put a summary end to it.

Pomp went to the galley to prepare the evening meal, while Barney went into the engine-room.

"I am now in great hopes of tracking down the brute, Nigra," said Lord Swelton, with a tremor in his voice. "Certainly, if it cannot be done with your assistance and that of your air-ship, Mr. Reade, we will have to give it up as a hopeless task."

The words had barely left his lips when Lord Swelton gave a groan, threw up his arms and fell like a log.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE POISONED ARROW.

FRANK READE, JR., was not six yards from the English nobleman at that moment.

He was astonished and horrified to see him fall but he saw at a glance what had caused it. Sticking in Lord Swelton's side was an arrow. It had seemed to come from nobody knew

"Lie perfectly still," said Frank earnestly. "I will try and draw the arrow out."

"Pray do so," rejoined Swelton. "It pains me dreadfully."

Frank cut away the wounded man's coat with his knife until he could see the flesh.

Then he took hold of the shaft and gently tried to extract it.

But it was imbedded above the barb, and his best efforts could not pull it out. A terrible cry of pain came from Swelton.

"My God! it is killing me!" cried the nobleman in agony.

Montgomery and Sir Archibald were in paroxysms of sympathy and fear. They, however, seemed too nervous to render any necessary assistance.

Frank saw at once that to get the arrowhead out would require a small surgical operation.

"Oh, Mr. Reade," cried Montgomery, apprehensively, "do—do you think it is a serious wound?"

"I cannot tell as yet," replied Frank, curtly. "Lord Swelton, I can remove that arrowhead, but I shall have to cut you a trifle. Can you stand it?"

"Yes, yes, go ahead," declared the plucky nobleman.

Pomp drew a keen scalpel knife from his pocket. He was quite well skilled in surgery, and in what seemed a jiffy he had sliced the offensive arrowhead out.

Frank took up the arrow head and examined it. He gave a great start.

Upon it was a peculiar stain. The young inventor looked very grave.

Frank had spent much time in India in previous years, and was quite well acquainted with the customs and practices of the thugs.

In this part of India he knew that the terrible hooded snake or cobra abounded. The natives were in the habit of poisoning the tips of their arrows with poison obtained from this deadly reptile.

The poison was an extremely virulent one,

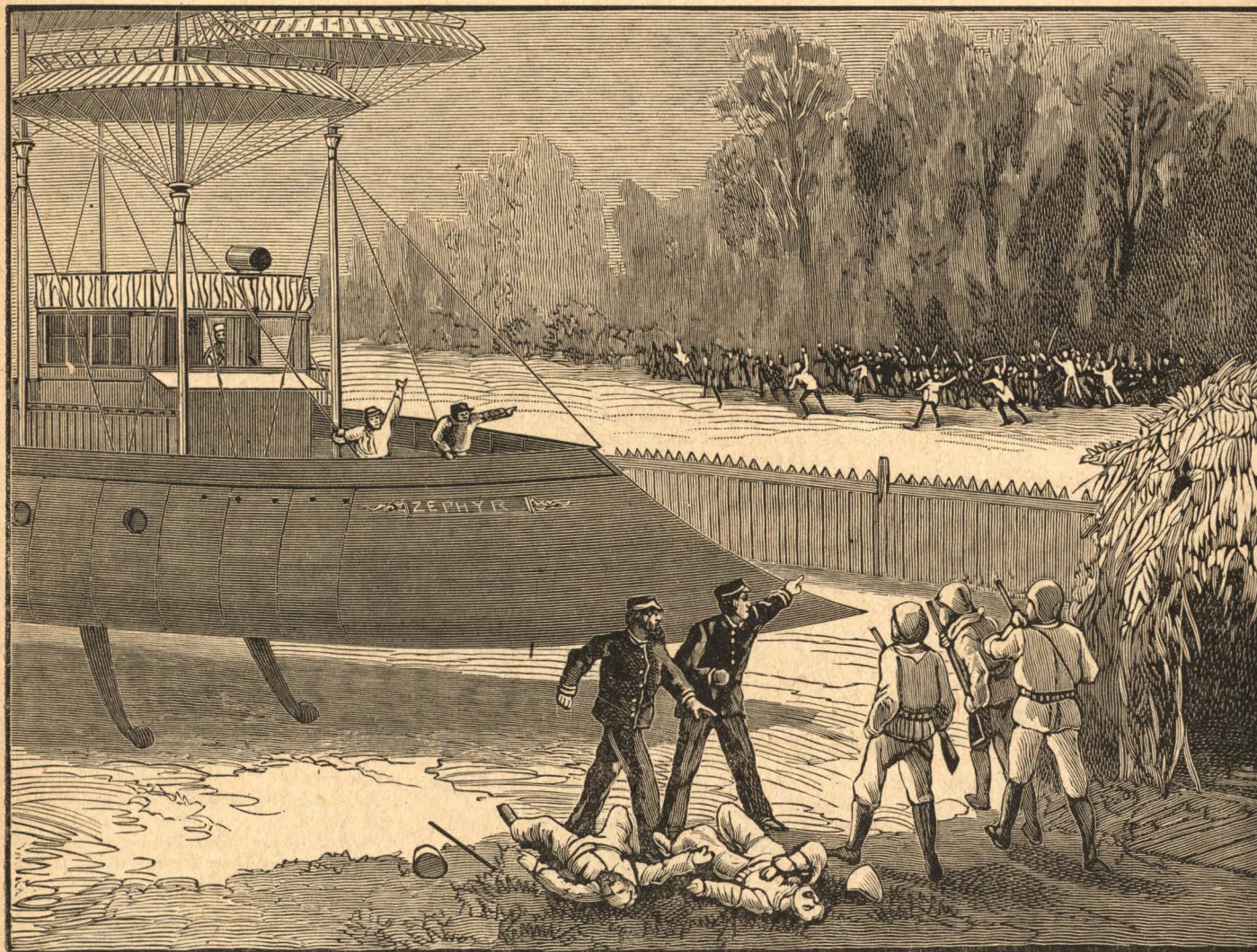
die now as at any time. I have lost Beatrice, and I have nothing to live for."

Frank knew the importance of keeping the man's spirits up.

"Don't say that, sir!" he cried. "You have everything to live for. Your daughter shall be rescued from the Thugs."

"It is hardly likely that she is alive," groaned the stricken man. "She has doubtless before this fallen a victim to the deadly vengeance of Nigra."

"Jes' yo' keep up yo' haht, sah," cried Pomp,



A warning cry came from Barney and Pomp on the air-ship's deck. Then into the clearing rushed a legion of the natives who had overcome their superstitious fear, and had returned to the attack.

A great moan of relief came from the suffering man.

"Thank heaven for that," he declared. "I feel a bit better."

That the arrow had been fired by one of the thugs was certain.

Indeed, others began to come along also, and it was deemed safest to go aboard the air-ship.

"I will teach those chaps a lesson," muttered Frank.

The wounded man was taken aboard the air-ship. But he complained of feeling sick. Frank studied his face and saw peculiar yellow lines which gave a thrill of horror.

"My soul, Lord Swelton, you are poisoned! Make your peace with God!"

"Poisoned!" cried Swelton, in horror.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Wait a moment and I'll tell you."

and few into whose system it entered ever lived to tell of their experience.

Lord Swelton had begun to show the effects of the poison, for there was no doubt but that the arrow was a poisoned one.

Realizing this fully, Frank's awful horror can be better imagined than described.

Something must be done, but what?

At this moment Pomp came on deck. Frank had begun to bind a ligature below the wound, when the ducky, who had heard of the affair came forward with a rush.

"Hol' on dar, Marse Frank!" he cried excitedly. "Jes' yo' wait one minit. Dis chile know how to fix dat ting."

"Is that so, Pomp?"

"Dat am a fac', Marse Frank."

"It is little matter," said Lord Swelton, hoarsely. "Perhaps it is as well that I should

"an' dis chile done sabe yo' or he kill hiss'ef too."

The plucky ducky adopted a dangerous but most efficient method of abstracting the poison from the wound.

This was to apply the lips to it and draw the poison out by suction. Of course it involved no little risk, for the slightest cut or break in the mouth would throw the deadly matter into one's system in a moment which would be beyond control.

But the ducky's thick lips covered the wound. In a moment he had drawn a great quantity of blood and virus, which he repeatedly ejected from his mouth.

The yellow lines in Lord Swelton's face began to disappear and his natural color to come back.

At length what seemed a sufficient amount

of the sucking process had been gone through with, and Pomp removed his lips.

Then Frank cauterized the wound carefully, and bound it up with soft lint.

Lord Swelton was given a tremendous dram of whisky and put to bed. Pomp rinsed out his mouth with a chemical solution furnished by Frank, and also got outside of a good swig of whisky, which latter event Barney witnessed with green-eyed envy.

Pomp was overwhelmed with the profuse congratulations and gratitude of the Englishmen, and they thrust handsome presents of money upon him. But he promptly refused them, saying:

"Dat am a'right, sah! If I hab saved de gemmen's life, den I hab done all dat I tried fo', sah. Youse berry welcome, gemmens, to my po' services."

Lord Swelton was now sound asleep. He was likely to awake some hours later quite himsel again.

The spirits of all were now high. Pomp was the hero of the hour.

It was now quite dark, and as Frank realized the danger of a night attack, he ordered Barney to raise the air-ship.

The Zephyr therefore went up into the air about three hundred feet, and was anchored to await the coming of daylight.

The night was pitchy dark, the moon and stars being obscured under dark clouds.

The vast country lay below like a hidden waste. All were sitting out on deck, when suddenly Barney, who was in the pilot-house, gave a sharp cry.

"Be jabbers, phwat the devil is that?" he cried. "Wud yez cum hyar, Misther Frank, an' tell a poor sowl phwativer yez call it."

"What's the matter, Barney?" cried Frank, leaping up and rushing to the pilot-house.

"Shure, sah, I don't know. But if yez will cast yer eye over ferninst the mountain side yez will see it too."

Frank did as directed, and was given a peculiar thrill.

Against the black gloom of the mountain he saw a number of dancing lights like ignis fantus. These were in perpetual and rapid motion.

They looked like stars bubbling up into the blackness from some fiery furnace below. The young inventor regarded the scene for a time in utter mystification.

"Well, that is queer!" he muttered. "What can it be?"

"Shure, sor, I'm thinkin' that it's some av thim bloody omadhouns av thugs as is doing it."

"Perhaps so, and yet it may be some curious natural phenomena."

By this time the whole party were regarding the enigma. The exclamations of wonderment were many.

"Well, pon honor!" exclaimed Sir Archibald, "what can it be?"

"I have seen a similar manifestation in swampy tracts," averred Dr. Vaneyke, "and it is generally believed to be the gases of decomposition. But this is upon too high ground for such an assumption."

"What can it be?"

"It is very strange."

"How curious."

"I will soon find out!" cried Frank Reade.

He sprang to the platform above and ignited the carbons of the search-light with an electric current from the dynamo room.

As the search-light flashed up a wonderful sight was beheld.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FRANK MAKES A DARING PROPOSAL.

IN the search-light's wonderful path of radiance there was witnessed an explanation of the dancing lights.

Upon a shelf of the mountain wall and directly before the mouth of an enormous cavern a large body of men were gathered.

All were sitting down in semi-circles with bowed heads before a number of tall poles in the hands of other fantastically dressed natives.

Upon these poles were the lights and they were moved up and down swiftly. A couple of dancing dervishes were seen in the center, and the whole affair was recognized at once as a peculiar form of religious ceremony.

That these were thugs there was no doubt. That they were a part of the tribe which had battled with our adventurers a few hours before it was safe to say.

Those on board the air-ship viewed the weird scene with a thrill.

"By Jove! what a sight that is!" cried Sir Archie. "I never saw anything more fantastic in my life."

"Nor I!" cried Montgomery. "They are evidently engaged in worship."

"Yes."

"Ah, now, see them skip!"

"Bejabbers an' it ain't afeard they be!" cried Barney with a roar of laughter.

"Golly, dat am a fac!" cried Pomp.

Indeed, a ludicrous scene now took place. The astounded thugs, dazzled by the brilliance of the search-light, and unable to understand its origin, had beat a hasty, pell mell retreat into the big cave.

It was comical enough to see the manner in which they went tumbling over each other in their haste.

Frank, however, had an idea in view.

"Up with the anchor, boys!" he cried.

Pomp and Barney sprang to the windlass, and the anchor was quickly raised. Then Pomp went to the pilot-house, and the air-ship was sent forward so as to be nearly over the spot where the thugs had been.

Not one of them was in sight now.

Frank turned the search-light's rays upon the spot and showed the vicinity up as bright as day.

All were now in a fever of excitement and anticipation.

"Do you imagine that the young lady, Miss Beatrice, is held a captive in that cavern?" asked Montgomery of Frank.

"That is hard to say," replied the young inventor, with a smile. "We may not be upon the right track at all, you know."

"God grant that we are!"

The air-ship was brought down as nearly as possible to the level of the cavern floor, and the search-light's rays were thrown into the interior of the place.

But little could be seen beyond a distance of one hundred feet, where the passage took a turn.

Of course, the air-ship could not enter the cavern. What was to be done?

It looked to be a necessity of the direst sort to enter and explore the place. But how was this to be done?

This was a question which Frank felt disposed to weigh carefully.

The Englishmen, Sir Archie and young Montgomery, awaited the result with deepest interest. Frank paced the deck a few moments in great doubt.

"Well, Mr. Reade," said Sir Archie finally,

with some impatience; "what do you think of it?"

"Indeed, it is quite a problem," replied Frank, earnestly. "Can nobody advance a plan?"

"Why—why, I should think that it would be the only course for us to band together and enter the place," declared Montgomery, whose blood was at fever heat.

"Pshaw! that is out of the question," interposed Sir Archie. "We would only be committing suicide."

"How so?"

"Why, that cavern probably holds several hundred of the villains. What show would we stand against such odds?"

This seemed logical enough. Dr. Vaueyke was appealed to for a scientific theory.

"There is only one way to do," he said, bluntly. "You have got to invade the enemy's stronghold."

"Impossible!" cried Sir Archie. "I tell you it can't be done."

"Then you have the alternative of waiting for the foe to come out and fight you."

"Can't we starve them out?"

"You would only be taking the life of Beatrice."

"But we do not know that she is in the place."

"We are acting upon that assumption."

Montgomery was waxing angry. Frank saw this at a glance and at once interposed to prevent an angry debate.

An idea had come to the young inventor like a flash.

For that matter he was hardly ever at a loss for an idea. His inventive genius was very seldom at fault.

"Wait, gentlemen!" he said, quietly. "I have an idea."

At once the attention of all was claimed.

"You have, Mr. Reade?" asked Sir Archie.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I am going to invade that cavern."

"You?"

"Yes."

Everybody stared at the young inventor.

"What, alone?"

"Alone."

"Mr. Reade that would be suicide," protested Sir Archie.

"Oh, I think not!" said Frank, with a smile.

"Shure yez will niver attempt to do that an' not take me!" cried Barney, eagerly. "Av yez leave me behind Misther Frank, I'll surely die afore yez come back av thinking about yez."

"That's all right, Barney," said Frank, quietly, "but this time I shall go alone."

"Sure phwat could yez hope to do as wan against all of thim rascals?"

"One man would stand as good a show as two."

Everybody looked aghast.

"Mr. Reade," said Montgomery, firmly, "we cannot agree to this sacrifice upon your part. It is suicidal."

"Gentlemen," said Frank, with a smile, "you are laboring under a delusion when you think I am incurring any risk whatever. I am going into that cavern and shall come out without being harmed in the least."

This was mystifying.

"Perhaps you'll explain," began Sir Archie, vaguely.

"Certainly," replied Frank, readily. "Barney, you and Pomp may go down to my cabin and bring up a metal case there marked No. 200."

Instantly a light of comprehension broke across the features of the two faithful servants, and Barney said:

"Shure, Misther Frank, phwy didn't we think av that afore? Sure, av course ye can't enter the cave safely enough, but shure won't yez let me go too?"

"Be off, you rascal!" cried Frank, sternly, and Barney departed with Pomp.

In a few moments they returned with a long black metal case. It was opened and a wonderful sight revealed.

It contained a wonderful suit of armor made of the finest meshes of steel, all impervious to a bullet at the shortest range, so tough and finely wrought was it.

From head to foot this armor covered Frank as he donned it. A visor was made to cover the face completely if necessary.

"Wonderful!" cried Sir Archie, with genuine admiration which was echoed by the others.

"But how can you battle with such odds?" cried Montgomery. "Despite the armor they would overwhelm and pin you down, Mr. Reade."

"You will see that that is quite impossible," replied Frank, as he adjusted the last links and stood clad in mail from head to foot.

He certainly looked like a knight of old in that wonderful armor.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WONDERFUL VICTORY.

FRANK certainly made a formidable appearance in the chain armor.

It was molded to his handsome, athletic form, and was so delicately constructed as to yield to every motion of the muscles with perfect pliability.

All regarded him with wonder and admiration.

"Now, Mr. Montgomery," said Frank, quietly, "if you wish I will explain to you why I shall successfully defy all the strength of my foes, no matter how numerous."

Frank turned open the vest of the mail coat.

"See," he said, "it is lined throughout with rubber which is a perfect insulator and non-conductor of electricity. Throughout the steel plates which you will see at intervals there are small wires. These all center in the back of the mail coat and are heavily charged by means of a long coil of wire which I carry from the air-ship with me, and which is connected with the dynamos. This makes of me a walking battery. A slight blow with my fist will knock a man senseless, and a harder blow would kill him. Indeed, it would matter not how great a gang assailed me, unless I was crushed by a cannon ball or some heavy missile of the sort. I could easily whip any number of the rascals single-handed. Now you may understand why I consider myself safe in invading the Thugs' cavern."

Montgomery and Sir Archibald had listened to Frank's statement with utter amazement.

It seemed almost beyond belief. They regarded the mail-clad young inventor with a keen surprise which words cannot describe.

"Pon honor!" exclaimed Montgomery, with a shrug of his shoulders, "you would be a great manager to have in time of war. I believe you'd invent something to whip the enemy if they stood one hundred to one."

"By Jupiter!" cried Sir Archie, "I would not care to enter the field against you, Mr. Reade, in anything like open battle. I should accept defeat as a foregone conclusion."

Frank laughed pleasantly and then proceeded to adjust his helmet.

"I have three of these sets of electric armor," he declared. "Barney and Pomp use the other two."

"But is this armor available when not charged with electricity?" asked Sir Archie.

"For purposes of defense—yes. It is bullet proof."

"Wonderful! You could get a large price for that invention from almost any nation in the world, Mr. Reade."

"It is not money or notoriety that I am after," declared Frank. "My inventions are my own, and gold cannot buy them."

He turned and gave a few orders to Barney and Pomp.

In vain the courageous and faithful Celt besought Frank to allow him to go also. The famous inventor was inflexible.

"You will stay where you are, Barney," he declared, firmly. "Keep that wire heavily charged and remember my signals."

"All roight, sor," replied Barney, with a rueful smile. "May the Blessid Vargin be wid yez, Misther Frank."

Frank now let himself down from the air-ship's deck.

His feet struck the ground, and he walked into the cavern, unreeling the electric wire as he did so.

In his right hand Frank carried a small incandescent lamp. By pressing a spring, he could with this flood the cavern with a fearfully brilliant light.

But this light he did not choose to use at once. He walked boldly into the black mouth of the cavern.

A moment before under the search-light's rays the place had seemed deserted. Now, however, just as Frank reached a point twenty feet inward, he heard a faint rustling sound behind him.

The young inventor's instinct told him what was coming.

He smiled grimly and kept right on. All happened in a flash of time. The Thug, for such it was behind him, sprang forward like a cat.

The next moment the deadly coil was winding itself around Frank's neck. Frank heard the swish of the cord, felt it tighten about his throat, and might have been alarmed under certain circumstances.

But he knew that the deadly garrote could not affect his chain armor and he felt safe.

He felt the cord tighten and then pretended to reel.

In a moment his foe was upon him. But the next moment the Thug was sorry for his attack.

Frank simply turned once and gave the fellow a crack with his gloved hand.

It was not a hard blow, but it was sufficient to knock the would-be murderer, figuratively speaking, into a cocked hat.

He lay in a senseless heap upon the cavern floor.

The cord was yet about Frank's neck. The young inventor removed it, and then went on his way into the cavern. All was pitchy darkness.

But it was not at all likely that he had not been spotted by the Thugs.

There was no doubt but that the companions of the fellow whom he had just disposed of had seen the event, and would make another attempt to stop his course.

In fact, Frank could already half see and actually feel a number of his foes about him. He held himself in momentary readiness for an attack.

And before he had gone ten steps further it came.

Suddenly dark forms swarmed about him; the air was filled with hissing cords, and several of these went twining about his neck.

Without his armor, it would have been to Frank a gantlet of death. As it was, however, the deadly cords could not do him harm, and he smiled grimly.

Swinging his arms about, he hit right and left, with thrilling results.

The astounded Thugs went down like tenpins. Not one of them uttered a sound after having experienced the force of the electric current.

Right and left Frank struck out, and the villains were utterly demoralized. Suddenly loud yells of rage and terror went up, and then there was a hasty retreat.

It was to them as if some merciless, terrible monster was in their midst, dealing blows right and left. The darkness did not enable them to determine the shape and size of their antagonist, or explain to them the secret of his tremendous power.

Frank followed them up hastily, but it suddenly became apparent to him that he could do nothing without the aid of light.

Accordingly he turned, the slide of the electric bulb in his hand.

In an instant the cavern was illumined with a light more brilliant than that of day.

The cavern floor was then seen to be strewn with dead and unconscious Thugs. In the cavern passage beyond, Frank saw scores of the dread and stealthy foe.

But he had little reason to fear them. It did not seem as if they could cope successfully with the terrible force over which he held such perfect control.

Yet the Thugs were not disposed to have their retreat invaded in this manner without some show of resistance.

A shower of bullets came from the shadows, and the cavern arches thundered with the report of the firearms.

But leaden missiles had little effect upon the chain armor, and Frank was not in the least injured.

Throwing the rays of the electric light into the deep passages, he advanced to the attack.

Many of the Thugs had not witnessed the force of his terrible blows, and these were disposed to offer resistance. They came swarming about him like bees, and for a time it seemed likely that he would be overpowered.

But the giant resistance of the electric current was sufficient for an army of such foes.

Frank had only one thing to dread and this was the possible severing of the wire which connected the armor with the dynamos aboard the air-ship.

This was very fine and thread-like and so pliable as to be easily reeled from a bobbin and by an automatic arrangement again reeled up.

If anything should come heavily in contact with this wire there was danger that it might be severed. In such a case Frank would of course be at the mercy of his foes.

Therefore he kept his back as much as possible to the cavern wall, taking care not to let his foes get in his rear.

Like Achilles his armor was not without a vulnerable part and this was it. He kept constantly upon his guard.

Frank sent the rays of his electric lamp into one of the cavern passages. He saw that the Thugs had there concentrated in force and were about to descend upon him.

They had clubs and cudgels for weapons and

suddenly with loud yells swooped down upon the young inventor.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A CHANGE OF PLANS.

THE attack of the band of Thugs was swift and fierce. Frank knew that upon its issue depended his plans, and then success.

Therefore, he braced himself well for the struggle.

On came the Thugs with savage cries, and brandishing their weapons. In spite of the superior and deadly force which Frank knew that he possessed, and which would affect the numbers of the foe, he felt a bit doubtful of the result.

The Thugs had heavy clubs and cudgels, having divined the fact that their foe was possessed of armor which would resist their rifle bullets.

A fearful blow from one of these weapons, Frank well knew, might terminate his career, if it succeeded in breaking the delicate wire upon which he depended for his abnormal muscular power.

But his eye fell upon a heavy iron bar lying upon the floor of the cavern.

At once he picked this up. The moment it came in contact with his armor it was charged with a powerful current, and became an awful weapon.

Frank hung his electric lamp at his belt and gripped the bar with both gloved hands.

One of the Thugs made a blow at him with a club.

Frank caught the blow on the iron bar, and the next moment the wretch went down like a felled ox.

Another was upon him, but a touch of the heavily charged bar knocked him into insensibility.

Yet this did not have the effect of checking the advance of the wretches. They came on in a furious body, making blows at the plucky invader.

But Frank managed to skillfully parry them all, and stood upon the defensive.

The iron bar which he wielded did terrible execution. The Thugs went down before its powerful sweep and terror seized them.

To them Frank, in his armor, assumed the proportions of a giant. What manner of man was this, who could with his single arm fight successfully with them all? Surely he must be a god, or perhaps endowed with some evil spirit. It was all a conundrum to the superstitious Thugs, and they yielded to terror.

Sharp orders went up from the leaders. Back into the main passage of the cavern they retreated in great disorder.

With a thrill Frank saw that he had won the battle.

He now quickly assumed the aggressive and began to pursue the foe.

From one part of the cavern to the other Frank went, chasing the terrified Thugs and looking for the girl captive Beatrice Swelton whom he believed to be in the cavern.

The Thugs retreated before him and suddenly Frank saw before him a patch of the night sky and came out of the cavern into the outer air.

This was another and upper exit from the place and further up the mountain side.

The Thugs had all disappeared and apparently made good their escape. No trace was to be found of Beatrice Swelton.

Frank could not pursue the Thugs further.

He returned therefore and made a careful search of the cavern.

But not the least trace of the missing girl

was to be found. Neither was there any evidence that she had been held a captive there at any time.

Of course it was possible that the escaping Thugs had taken her away with them.

But Frank discredited this. He hit upon a new theory, and this was that the Englishman had not been pursuing the right parties all this while, and that Nigra was not of this band of Thugs.

With this clearly formed conclusion, he did not waste further time in the vicinity, but started at once to return to the air-ship.

This was an easy matter, and as he came out of the cavern into the glare of the search-light, the loud cries of joy from the lips of his anxious friends greeted his ears.

"Whurroo! May the Blissid Vargin be praised av it ain't Mистер Frank, back agin safe an' sound!" cried Barney, joyfully.

"Golly sakes! dis am de bes' ob luck!" yelled Pomp, exuberantly.

"Thank Heaven!" cried Sir Archie and Montgomery in one breath, while Dr. Vaneyke hastened to meet the young inventor at the gangway.

Frank was overwhelmed with the joyful greeting.

Almost before he was allowed to remove his armor, he was forced to detail the story of his adventures in the cave.

The air-ship's crew listened with deepest interest. When Frank had finished Montgomery gave an exclamation of pain.

"My soul!" he gasped, "if we are then off the track how shall we ever find Beatrice?"

"Swelton will be much disappointed," declared Sir Archie, in a despondent tone. "We had better not tell him just yet. Then you really think we are on the wrong track, Mr. Reade?"

"I do," replied Frank, positively, "but keep up good heart. I am going to stick by you and see you through. With the air-ship we can scour India, and if we do not find Miss Swelton it will be no fault of ours."

"God bless you, Mr. Reade!" cried Sir Archie fervently. "You will remove a mighty woe from the heart of a doting and broken-spirited father. You will not fail to get your reward for such an act of noble sort."

"I seek no reward other than the consciousness of having rendered a suffering fellow being a favor," declared Frank, modestly.

Then he hastily removed his armor, and presently reappeared upon deck.

Barney and Pomp were waiting for orders, and as Frank appeared the Celt cried:

"Mister Frank, phwat wud yez have us be doing av now? Sure we're all ready for a ruction or a riot. Jist give us the wurrud."

"Well, Barney!" said Frank, quickly. "I think we'll take a cruise over this valley and explore it by search light. Let Pomp go to the pilot-house and you attend to the search light. I will be in the bow and give you orders!"

"All right, sar!" cried Barney, readily. "I'll do jist as ye say, sar."

Barney went at once to the post on the bridge above.

He quickly had the search light in good working order. Pomp was in the pilot-house.

In a moment the air-ship rose like a great bird, and hung two hundred feet over the valley.

Then Frank sent the rays of the search light down to the earth making the spot where its rays rested as plain as day.

The dense woods of the valley and the hill-

sides were passed over, and the clear spaces were thoroughly swept by the penetrating rays.

But no sign of human life was to be found anywhere. Whatever direction had been taken by the Thugs, they certainly were not in sight now.

For several miles about wood and jungle, hillside and plain were thoroughly searched. But not a sign of the Thugs was discovered.

Where they had disappeared to so suddenly was certainly a problem of no mean sort.

For hours the quest was kept up, and until daylight broke. Then it was abandoned, and a new method of procedure was discussed.

Lord Swelton now appeared on deck, assisted by Montgomery.

His lordship insisted upon leaving his berth, and also demanded the details of the night's work.

Frank had not wished to acquaint him with them, but Swelton insisted so strongly that he was obliged to do so.

His lordship bore the dismaying news of the failure to rescue Beatrice with more of calmness and fortitude than it had been believed that he would.

"So we have been on the wrong track all the while!" he mused. "Well this is most discouraging. It cannot be, however, that God will not grant my prayers. I shall still continue to cling to hope."

"Good for you!" cried Frank, with great pleasure. "Keep up your courage, sir, and I feel sure that we shall yet succeed."

A long conference was held in the cabin. The decision arrived at was that the Zephyr should be headed for a range of mountains distant not more than one hundred miles, and in which were some old ruins, where it was believed that the main body of the brotherhood of Thugs was located.

Here it was supposed that novices were taught the art of the cord and the stealth of the human panther, whose victims are legion in that benighted portion of savage India.

As Nigra was known to be high in his profession, it was deemed not improbable that he was at this headquarters of the murderous league.

If so, undoubtedly Beatrice was there also. It was, therefore, decided to proceed at once to Negum, as the place was called.

The air-ship was headed in that direction. The day was opening fair and warm, and the sun's rays beat down pitilessly upon the air-ship's deck.

Pomp was in the pilot-house and Barney was in the bow, while Frank Reade, Jr., and the others were sitting in steamer chairs amidships. Suddenly a startling thing happened.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FIRE IN THE JUNGLE.

A TREMENDOUS and awful roar broke upon the air and the air-ship bounded upward at the same time, rocking and swaying terribly as if under the influence of some mighty force beneath it.

Then vast clouds of ashes, smoke and fire filled the air around it.

In an instant one could not see across the deck for flying dust and ashes which filled the eyes and nostrils, and seemed likely to suffocate all on board.

Frank Reade, Jr., kept his presence of mind and had managed to shout:

"Pull lever No. 11, Pomp. Let the air-ship up-up!"

"My God!" cried Lord Swelton in agony. "I am suffocating! What is it?"

"What has happened?"

"God help us! Has the world come to an end?"

Indeed, there was good cause for almost any conclusion at that moment. The awful roar, the flying ashes, the sparks of fire, all would seem to bear out this or any like hypothesis that the world was really coming to an end.

But Frank Reade, Jr., had been astute enough to in an instant guess the truth.

The ashes did not enter the pilot-house, for with great presence of mind Pomp had shut the door.

The darkey had heard Frank's order, and instantly pulled Lever No. 11.

The air-ship leaped quickly upward. With the velocity of the wind it rose, and in a few moments was once more in the sunshine.

But the ship itself was a sight to behold.

Its deck was literally covered half a foot deep in ashes. Some of these were alive, and there would have been danger of fire had there been wood in the composition of the Zephyr's deck.

Those who were on deck were also a funny-looking set of objects.

The ashes had covered them with a gray coating, and they looked odd enough. It required no little work to dig it out of eyes and ears so that they could see and hear.

"Great guns!" gasped Sir Archie, in a sputtering way; "what on earth has happened? What do you call it?"

"Did a cloud of ashes burst over us?" shouted Montgomery. "Where did they come from?"

"Begorra, that's phwat I'd like to know!" exploded Barney.

Pomp, in the pilot-house, was the only one to escape the douche. He could not help a laugh as he viewed the others.

But Dr. Vaneyke was at the rail.

"I'll explain it to you," he cried, "if you will only come here a moment."

All rushed to the rail and looked over. A wonderful sight was presented to them.

Below, fully a thousand feet, was a tossing cloud of fire and ashes. These completely obscured any view of the earth whatever.

"The world is burning up!" shouted Montgomery, in horror. "Certainly it has that appearance."

"Not so!" cried Dr. Vaneyke.

"What is it then?"

"Listen, and I'll tell you. We are directly over the crater of some volcano, which burst into an eruption without a moment's notice, and just as we were passing over it."

"A volcano?"

"Yes, and as soon as the air-ship drifts a little ways further, you will be beyond the cloud of eruption, and you can see it very plainly."

Dr. Vaneyke's prediction proved true.

The air-ship's propeller soon placed her beyond the cloud, and then it could be seen that it all came from the crater of a volcano far below.

By a singular chance they had happened to be over the crater just as the eruption came.

It was a very narrow escape from destruction, as all were bound to admit. But now that the danger was over the spirits of all rose. The first move necessary was to shake the ashes from their clothing. Fortunately, they were light and easily removed, though all found it necessary to cleanse themselves with a good bath.

Barney and Pomp found a good sized job on their hands to clean the decks and helices of the air-ship.

They did not grumble with the task, however, but went bravely to work, and in a short time the air-ship was once more put to rights.

All now began to look forward eagerly to the arrival at Negum.

What they would encounter there and what the results they could only imagine. But thrilling adventures were in store.

The air-ship kept a steady course for over two hours. At the expiration of this time Frank began to look for the mountain in which were the ruins said to be the headquarters of the brotherhood of Thugs.

The mountain was located by Dr. Vaneyke. It was a high peak with an extinct crater.

Toward it the air-ship proceeded. But long before it was reached a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly a line of fire was seen to leap into life through the dense dry mass of a jungle some five miles away.

It was at first a small flame, but with the

rapidity of lightning speedily assumed the proportions of a mighty fire.

At the same moment, from another quarter of the jungle came another sheet of flame. Frank at once procured his long-range glasses and proceeded to study the distant blaze.

As he did so he became impressed with a thrilling fact.

The fires were at regular intervals and set as with one common accord. It looked plainly as if human agency was at the bottom of it.

"By Jove! that is queer," muttered Frank.

"If that is true, what are they up to?"

"I have an idea that they are smoking out a tiger," ventured Montgomery.

"I don't believe it," averred Sir Archie, incredulously. "They would not set fire to such a large amount of jungle."

Frank said nothing, but watched the scene a few minutes.

Then he gave orders to Pomp to head the Zephyr for the spot. Stationing himself in the bow, he carefully scrutinized the distant fire.

Several remarkable things he noted, and one of these was that the jungle ended against the blank and precipitous wall of a mountain.

It looked as if the fires had been set in a semi-circle to drive some wild beast to bay at the foot of this mountain wall. A great chill seized Frank. What if it was a human being?

The air-ship shot forward and in a short while a part explanation of the fire was made plain.

Upon the land which had already been burned, and following the line of the fire, were a number of people.

They were savage in dress and features, and Dr. Vaneyke exclaimed

"They are not Thugs but natives of this region, a kind of mountain peasant. They are an honest class."

"Is that possible?" cried Sir Archie. "I did not believe that an honest native could be found in India. Are they Brahmins?"

"I believe they are," replied the scientist.

"They are probably engaged in smoking out a tiger. But, no! Look! My God, what a horrible sight!"

The words of the aged scientist brought all to the rail, and they beheld an awful spectacle.

END OF PART I.

The continuation and conclusion of this story can be found in the FRANK READE LIBRARY No. 92 entitled, "FRANK READE, JR.'S NEW ELECTRIC AIR SHIP THE "ZEPHYR," or, FROM NORTH TO SOUTH AROUND THE GLOBE," by "Noname," Part II.

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